

Ohio House Constitutional Resolutions Committee
Opponent Testimony by Ariel Miller
HJR 1
April 19, 2023

Dear Chairman Plummer and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Joint Resolution 1 to raise the hurdles for citizen-sponsored amendments to the Ohio Constitution.

I am a Christian voter in Cincinnati who has spent my career working and volunteering through the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio to help communities overcome poverty, prevent violence, and to create conditions together where all of us can flourish. Peaceful participation in the democratic process of voting and debating legislation requires both trust in government and hope that the citizens' voice will be heeded.

The events of the past three years in Ohio have seriously eroded citizens' hope and trust in our state legislature. The first blow is the corruption that greased the passage of HB 6 in 2019 and undercut the citizen initiative to repeal it. Despite the convictions of former Speaker Householder and Mr. Borges, citizens have been unable to persuade the Legislature to repeal the OVEC coal subsidies which are charged to all Ohio ratepayers – we're having to pay for ongoing corruption (I see those subsidies as a bribe to win OVEC's support for HB 6) The second is the disastrous redistricting impasse of 2021-22, where the legislative leaders of the Redistricting Commission refused to comply with the standards passed by over 70% of Ohio voters to prevent the creation of gerrymandered districts. You have colluded in the creation of state district and Congressional maps that enable incumbents to choose their voters, rather than being accountable to them.

For more than a century, Ohioans have had the right to attempt citizen-sponsored constitutional amendments, and very few amendments have been adopted. It's already extremely difficult, and not something any citizen would undertake unless all other options seem devoid of hope. You're now proposing to raise the bar from a simple majority to 60% of the vote, and expand the geographic hurdles in signature collection.

If you pass SJR 2, you'll send a powerful message to Ohio voters that they have no voice or hope of having a state government willing to heed their concerns. The timing of this measure, as voters prepare at least three constitutional amendment drives to correct abuses for which the legislature has denied them relief, delivers another devastating blow to the trust and hope that we must have to resolve conflicts and make policy peacefully.

To restore the trust broken by the HB 6 and redistricting scandals, and to rebuild hope, please drop this proposal to move the goal posts for citizen participation in state policy.

Thank you.

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