

# OHIO FAMILIES UNITE

## FOR POLITICAL ACTION AND CHANGE

Chair Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer, Ranking Member Mohamed, and members of the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Emily Cole, I'm a resident of Hilliard Ohio, and I am the Executive Director of Ohio Families Unite for Political Action and Change, or OFUPAC. The families I stand with and for often disproportionately bear the brunt of the legislative and policy decisions made in this space, given the oppressive expansion of hyper-partisan politics inherent in this general assembly. I am here today to stand for our families in strong opposition to House Joint Resolution 1.

House Joint Resolution 1 is a dishonest and bad-faith attempt at rigging our constitution to avoid actual accountability by our Secretary of State in his ill-kept "secret" quest for federal office, through lawmakers seeking to build political will.

I served as the Campaign Manager for a failed attempt at a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment in 2021. Anyone who believes citizen-initiated constitutional amendments are easy likely has never been part of one. Language has to be so precise to pass the vetting process of the Attorney General's office that it frequently takes multiple rounds of initial signature-gathering. And *then*, once approved by the ballot board, a near Herculean effort is undertaken to gather the requisite signatures to make it to the statewide ballot in a general election. It takes incredible organization, significant financial resources, and an iron will and dedication to the matter at hand.

Raising the threshold essentially ensures even more money will be spent on these efforts. Each voter is equated with a dollar amount, or a cost per signature, as well as a later cost per vote. Raising the threshold increases the number of votes needed, driving up the cost. You are virtually guaranteeing any groups looking to amend our constitution *must seek outside funding from national partners*. This very clearly does the opposite of protecting our Constitution from "outside special interests" – rather, it makes it dependent upon them.

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I'd also like to take a moment to correct the record on what an outside special interest even is. Frankly, if we look at the power dynamics in our statehouse, we as *Ohioans* are outside special interests, because we are outside the sphere of power. Our legislature does not look like us, either demographically or politically. We don't have directly-impacted elected officials. Our impacted families are very used to being disregarded in this space. They are repeatedly viewed as a political tool by both parties, and not as *people*. The power of a constitutional amendment is among the top opportunities we as Ohioans have to recourse for criminal legal system reform. It's why we continue, even when our efforts fail, to attempt to put statewide constitutional amendments on the ballot.

Our families will continue to stand up, speak out, and organize to defeat any effort that attempts to silence the majority to benefit the minority. We do this work from the heart, with a scrappy and dogged determination to build an Ohio that is fair for us *all* and free from a gerrymandered supermajority rigging each and every aspect of our political power spectrum to rule.

So while I urge you to vote no on House Joint Resolution , I also promise you this. The Ohio that will turn out to vote on this is if you pass it is not the Ohio you've been betting on. We've made sure of it.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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