

4/17/2023

Rev Joan VanBecelaere
Columbus, Ohio

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

I would like to voice my opposition to HJR 1. I believe we need to preserve our time-honored Ohio democratic institution of the Voter Ballot Initiative process rather than try to destroy it. I am opposed to anything that makes it harder for voters to directly engage in our democracy or amend the Ohio Constitution when the people's need arises.

If I were able to address you face to face, I would ask each of you to tell me why you want to make it more difficult for voters to engage in our state's democratic process. What is your reason for proposing this impediment to hearing the voices of the voters?

I know it is not a problem with the integrity of the current process. Over the past many, many decades, we have not seen any debilitating issues with the integrity of the process, nor have we seen acts of corruption connected to our process. The initiative process as it stands now works.

So why would you want to make the great and expensive effort to block this working process? Why would some of you go so far as to try to ignore the ban on expensive August elections that you all recently put in place just to make it harder for voters to participate in Ballot Initiatives?

My faith teaches me that we must honor the worth and dignity of all people. This requires that we hear their voices. Our sacred freedom to vote is one of the most important ways in which we hear the voices and concerns of those around us. The Rev Raphael Warnock once wrote "A vote is a kind of prayer for the world we desire for ourselves and our children." HJR 1 would silence the votes and the voices of those who must be heard in Ohio.

Unfortunately, we have already heard why some of you want to make it more difficult for voters to engage in the initiative process. Rep. Brian Stewart of Ashville already told us in a letter that it was necessary to make the initiative process more difficult to protect "decades of Republicans'

work” to ensure that reproductive rights are no longer upheld or honored in Ohio.

The women of Ohio know that control over our own bodies is at stake here. Our worth and dignity are at stake here.

We also know from Rep. Stewart’s letter that there is fear that the people will propose a more tightly worded and effective anti-gerrymandering amendment to assure fair representation in the Ohio Statehouse as well as the U.S. House of Representatives. The power to gerrymander at will and deny our democratic principles is part of HJR 1.

Fighting for our democracy is in the spiritual DNA of Ohio’s collective and diverse faith traditions. We have seen throughout history that when people of faith join together for what is fair and just, we can and will protect our communities, engage in our democratic process, and hold elected officials accountable.

Ohio voters can see that HR 1 is an attempt to maintain political power and undemocratic control in Ohio despite the concerns and wishes of the people of Ohio. Please show the voters that you truly care about hearing their voices. Please stop HJR 1