

Ohio House Joint Resolution 1 – Opponent Testimony

My name is Tim O’Hanlon and I am testifying in opposition to Ohio House Joint Resolution 1. I still remember being pleasantly surprised to learn that Ohio, my adopted state, had, in September 1912, approved all the existing forms of direct citizen democracy at issue, including the right to:

- Initiate amendments to the state constitution;
- Approve amendments to the state constitution passed by the Ohio General Assembly;
- Initiate new state statutes; and
- Overturn laws passed by the General Assembly, referred to as Veto Referendum.

I was even more impressed to learn that Ohio, along with Massachusetts and Michigan, was one of only three states east of the Mississippi to adopt all of the forms of direct citizen democracy.

This Ohio tradition, now over 110 years old, epitomizes the ideal of one person, one vote by requiring only a bare plurality of 50% plus 1 vote to pass or reject a statewide statute or constitutional amendment. By requiring a 60% supermajority to amend the Ohio Constitution, Ohio HJR 1 would deal a crippling blow to the most common form of grassroots democracy in the state.

In the short term, Ohio HJR 1 marks an attempt to gain political advantage on highly contentious issues that divide residents of this state. But the price of a possible legislative win or two is not worth the resulting long-term damage to a distinguished legacy of direct democracy, one in which Ohio has stood out among other states in the Midwest and the East. The proposal to require a 60% supermajority to amend the Ohio Constitution through citizen generated ballot initiatives makes the state a less democratic place to live for ordinary people, no matter what party they belong or to, or issues they support or oppose.

