



**Opposition Testimony to Senate Joint Resolution 2
Ohio House Constitutional Resolutions Committee
Mia Lewis, Common Cause Ohio
May 1, 2023**

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am the associate director of Common Cause Ohio, an organization committed to open and accountable government that serves the public interest.

For a while now, the idea of changing the Ohio Constitution to make it harder to get citizen-led initiatives on the ballot and harder for them to pass has been discussed and debated across the state. This committee has heard (and refused to hear) a lot of knowledgeable and considered testimony in opposition to HJR1. SJR2 is now all but identical.

You've read the op-eds by the historians. You've read the editorials by newspapers as diverse as [the Lima News](#) and the Columbus Dispatch. You've seen the hearing rooms packed with citizens from across the state. You've heard a unanimous opinion from four past governors—two Democrats and two Republicans. You've read an opposition letter from 240 organizations and counting representing the voices of millions of Ohioans.

You've been reminded about Ohio's Constitutional Convention in 1912, Teddy Roosevelt's speech, and the important deliberations made over months that gave Ohioans our legacy of direct access to the ballot.

You've heard that since then, Ohioans from across the political spectrum have used this right to improve our state—for example, term limits in 1992, minimum wage in 2006, and victims' rights in 2017.

You know now how difficult it is to get an issue on the ballot: hence, only a handful of citizen-led initiatives have made it onto the ballot in the last 20 years. As anyone can tell you,

getting enough validated signatures to get on the ballot is an arduous task. The argument that it is too easy to get on the ballot simply doesn't hold water.

You've heard the facts showing that these ballot measures are not overused: There has not been a citizen initiative on the ballot since 2018. Over the past 10 years, there were only four elections with ballot measures through signature collection. In the past 50 years, there were 28 years without a citizen initiative on the ballot. Of those elections that had a ballot measure, only a handful of the elections had more than one issue for voters to consider.

Ohio voters are thoughtful about changes to the Ohio Constitution. Since 1913, the first year of implementation of the constitutional initiative, through 2017, Ohioans have voted on 71 citizen-initiated constitutional initiatives. Of these 71, 19 have been approved, for a passage ratio of 27%.

You have heard the testimony confirming that this kind of change would not protect us from special interests—quite the opposite! These changes could permanently lock out grassroots groups since ONLY special interests would have the resources to collect in all 88 counties without the need for a cure period.

As for “protecting the Constitution” by pushing through this amendment in a *special*, special election in August, it does not take much to see you've got it upside down and backwards: While there could be better turnout than usual, allowing 50% of perhaps 8 or 10% of voters this August to permanently change the Ohio Constitution and cement in place minority rule is the very opposite of protection—it is a grievous harm.

Indeed, one by one, the arguments put forward by sponsors of both HJR1 and SJR2 have been refuted and definitely proven false.

Now that these arguments have been thoroughly put to rest, the only remaining question is why, WHY, are you pushing forward with this idea? Not just pushing forward, but rushing forward helter skelter, against all common sense and propriety?

Could the answer have anything to do with a certain Illinois billionaire who said “Jump”?

Or could it have to do with political pressure from a specific group of Christian conservatives with an agenda that does not match up with that of the majority of Ohioans?

You've heard all of this by now. But here we are.

If you insist on pushing forward regardless, everyone knows you are doing so in direct opposition to what most Ohioans want. You are doing so because you don't want a check on the state legislature's power. You are doing so for political expediency or because a billionaire in Illinois is more important to you than millions of Ohioans.

The further you push down this road, the more anger you are stirring up. Ohioans are not stupid. They get the connection between what's happening in November and your rush for August. They will not be shy to show you what they think. As has been said before—the Ohio that will show up in August is not the Ohio you are banking on.