



TO: Senate General Government Committee
FROM: Greer Aeschbury, Ohio Campaign Manager, All Voting is Local Action
DATE: 4/17/2023
RE: Senate Joint Resolution 2 Require 60% vote to approve any constitutional amendment

Chair Rulli, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate General Government Committee:

My name is Greer Aeschbury, and I am the Campaigns Manager at All Voting is Local Action, an organization that exists to expose and dismantle threats to voter freedom in order to make voting safe, fair, and accessible, to build a democracy for us all. AVL Action Ohio is also a member of the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition, a coalition of pro-voter organizations. We testify in strong opposition to SJR 2.

Changing the citizen-initiated ballot measure process for Ohio's constitution is bigger than any one issue. No matter what issues you may support or oppose, changing the rules of our state constitution in order to suppress majority rule because one does not like the potential outcome of an issue is no democratic way to combat it. It is simply undemocratic, unfair, and unpopular, and will cost every Ohio voter the promise of one person, one vote because it will end majority rule.

If our legislators are concerned about the outcome of a citizen-led initiative, they have every right to campaign against it and seek to win votes to their side. They do not, however, have the right to change the rules of the constitutional amendment rights that we've had for over 100 years and impose their will on Ohioans.

Changing the constitution in this way is incredibly short-sighted of these legislators. It denigrates our democracy and our constitution and is also disrespectful to Ohio citizens.

When such a monumental change to our constitution is proposed, the least it deserves is time, reflection, and robust public debate. One deeply troubling aspect of the effort to ram this constitutional change through is the rushed effort to put this before voters in an August special election. I think this quote sums up the reason this is undemocratic and unfair:

"August special elections generate chronically low turnout because voters aren't expecting an election to occur. This is bad news for the civic health of our state. Interest groups often

manipulatively put issues on the ballot in August because they know fewer Ohioans are paying attention. As a result, the side that wins is typically the one that has a vested interest in the passage of the issue. Voters are just as capable of voting on these important issues during the standard primary and general elections.”

Who spoke these sage words? Those are not the words of any organization, individual or group who stands opposed to SJR 2. In fact, those words come directly from our Secretary of State Frank LaRose, who is one of the key proponents of this legislation. Secretary LaRose knows better than many the expense and burden of August Special elections, as this was a common theme in his testimony leading up to the vote on HB 458. He called them “costly, low-turnout, and unnecessary election(s) for our county boards to administer.” Yet he and the rest of the legislators who support this cause seem willing to spend \$20 million dollars - out of the pocket of Ohioans - on an August Special Election to serve their own special interest.

Proponents of this bill have claimed that this resolution “protects” Ohio from special interests. The only thing this bill bars us from is the will of the majority. If Ohioans have the opportunity to make a decision about our constitution, a minority of voters should not outweigh the majority. Gutting the will of the majority will gut the true meaning of our democracy. One thing we agree on with Mike Gonidakis, proponent of this legislation when he says: “I can't stress enough that protecting our Constitution applies to large businesses, small businesses in Ohio, farmers, proliferers, anyone.”

Ohioans from every political persuasion, with a range of values and beliefs, can all agree that our democracy is about the will of the majority. If we strip away this fundamental principle we allow a minority to rule. Those in power at the moment may think this will protect their interests for generations to come, but it will have a deep, perverse and lasting impact on the state of democracy in Ohio. Ohioans could feel the detrimental ramifications of this resolution for the rest of our lives.

Ohioans cannot trust public officials who seek to manipulate the rules of the game in order to get their win.

Ohioans cannot trust public officials who say one thing on Dec. 9 and a completely different thing on April 19. Who vote on laws banning special elections in January and then completely change their tune to hold special elections in August in order to undermine a ballot initiative they don't like in November.

The entire effort to jam this bill through should be an embarrassment to every legislator supporting it. It is a blatant power grab. We urge this committee to vote no if they truly believe in our democracy in our Ohio and want to protect it. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.