



Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

**Testimony of Chris Tavenor regarding Senate Bill 92
Managing Director of Democracy Policy, OEC Action Fund
Before the General Government Committee of the Ohio Senate**

Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora and Members of the Ohio Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this committee regarding Senate Bill (SB) 92. My name is Chris Tavenor, Managing Director of Democracy Policy for the OEC Action Fund. We oppose SB 92 because it creates an unnecessary special election to put SJR 2 before voters before fewer voters than would turn out during a November general election.

At the OEC Action Fund, we fundamentally believe a healthy democracy is integral to ensuring all Ohioans can have a healthy environment. To advocate and fight for the beautiful places we love, for clean air to breathe and safe water to drink, we must have a democracy that responds to our needs. In December 2022, we were proud to join with hundreds of other organizations in opposition to HJR 6. We're proud to be back opposing the efforts to push SJR 2 / HJR 1 through during the 135th General Assembly. Opposing SB 92 is all part of that same goal.

Direct democracy is a tradition in Ohio. The act of gathering signatures for an issue we care about—then placing that issue on the ballot—it's fundamental to how our democracy works. And Ohioans don't pass constitutional amendments lightly. In fact, many constitutional amendments fail once on the ballot.

SB 92 is simply an effort to force SJR 2 onto the ballot as quickly as possible, before voters during a special election, just after this legislature last year all but eliminated special elections.

The OEC Action Fund has an obligation to its constituency to call this process what it is—an explicit effort to short-circuit the right of direct democracy in Ohio by placing it on the ballot at a time when very few Ohioans will vote in an August special election. It is an explicit effort to ensure Ohioans do not know they are missing an election where they're having a fundamental right vitally altered.

While this testimony is not specifically about SJR 2, it is all part of the same narrative. We ask the General Assembly to reconsider this course of action. While we would prefer the substantive

issues of SJR 2 end here, in committee, if it is to be put to the voters for consideration, it must be considered during a November election.

The truth is, the real interests behind SJR 2 made themselves known in late 2022 in communications back and forth between sponsors. SJR 2 is designed to block future efforts to amend the Ohio Constitution on particular substantive issues popular with Ohioans but not with particular special interests and elected officials. The real reasons behind SJR 2 represent the exact reason the right to ballot initiative was enshrined in the Ohio Constitution back in 1912 in the first place.

For these reasons and many more, the OEC Action Fund urges members of this committee to vote no on SB 92. We look forward to future opportunities to discuss meaningful reform to Ohio's direct democracy—reforms that truly enhance the experience and make people a fundamental part of the process. We hope the Ohio General Assembly will finally put this issue to bed.

SB 92 is an unnecessary law creating an unnecessary special election that wastes taxpayer dollars in pursuit of political expediency, rather than democratic participation. It's simply bad policy. If SJR 2 is to be put to the vote, put it to a vote during a November election.

Respectfully submitted,

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