



# Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

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**Testimony of Chris Tavenor regarding House Bill 144 and Senate Bill 92  
Managing Director of Democracy Policy, OEC Action Fund  
Before the Government Oversight Committee of the Ohio House**

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Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan and Members of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this committee regarding HB 144 and SB 92. My name is Chris Tavenor, Managing Director of Democracy Policy for the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. We oppose HB 144 and SB 92—combined with House Joint Resolution 1 / Senate Joint Resolution 2, they are an attack on the right of all Ohioans to the citizen-initiated constitutional amendment process. An August special election to shove bad policy through is unfair, undemocratic, and a waste of our taxpayer dollars.

**A healthy environment requires a healthy democracy. Chaos does not create a healthy democracy.** But all but eliminating August special elections in 2022 then bringing them back less than a year later is the epitome of chaos—and an excellent example of the General Assembly’s continued attempts to unfairly restrict the power of Ohioans at the polls.

August special elections are some of the lowest voter turnout elections Ohio experiences. Oftentimes less than ten percent of a jurisdiction’s voters show up during special elections. Thus, if Ohioans voted on HJR 1 during an August special election, it’s quite possible less than ten percent of the state’s voters could decide the future of direct democracy in this state.

Current estimates indicate that an August special election could cost Ohio taxpayers upwards of \$20 million. We ask the General Assembly to reconsider this course of action. While HJR 1 is definitely bad policy for Ohioans, if it is to be put to a vote, it should occur during a General Election, not during a Special Election. Elections cost money, time, and resources, and this attack against direct democracy is simply a waste of all three of those things.

The OEC Action Fund is just one of [more than 225 organizations](#) speaking out against these measures. And we’re not alone. Former Ohio Governors Dick Celeste (D), John Kasich (R), Ted Strickland (D), and Bob Taft (R) [oppose the effort](#) to make it harder to amend the Ohio Constitution, describing these plans as unfair to Ohioans.

For these reasons and many more, the OEC Action Fund urges members of this committee to vote no on HB 144 and 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.

HJR 1 is an unnecessary constitutional amendment. It's simply bad policy. Ohioans have passed and failed constitutional amendments by a simple majority for over a century, and there's no reason to change a system that isn't broken.

Likewise, HB 144 and SB 92 are bad vehicles for bad policy. If we must consider HJR 1, put it before voters during the November general election instead.

Regardless, if HB 144 and SB 92 pass—along with HJR 1—we will join the chorus of Ohioans fighting to protect our right to direct democracy at the polls.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Tavenor  
Managing Director of Democracy Policy  
OEC Action Fund  
[ctavenor@theoec.org](mailto:ctavenor@theoec.org)