



Democracy & Government

Written testimony to the House Government Oversight Committee opposing HJR 6

Hannah Halbert

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Joint Resolution 6 on behalf of Policy Matters Ohio.

Policy Matters is a non-profit research institute that works to give all Ohioans the tools and opportunities to live happy, healthy lives, no matter where they live or what they look like. We believe that fundamentally, many of you want the same thing for Ohioans. HJR 6 undermines that goal.

Most Ohioans believe that having the freedom to hold our government accountable is sacrosanct. That freedom underpins our entire democratic system. When a few self-interested politicians find new ways to rig the rules to advance an unpopular agenda, they're not simply pursuing policy goals — they're undermining centuries of mutual trust and respect built between the people and our government.

When we, the people, go to the polls to elect our representatives, we're trusting that those we put in power will act in good faith, with our best interests in mind. And conversely, our elected leaders must trust the people they represent to know best what we need and respect our collective voice.

Lately, it seems like a handful of Ohio politicians don't trust the people of our state — and may even hold us in contempt. They seem to find every way possible to override the will of the people, including racialized voter purges, gerrymandering, flagrant defiance of court orders, and now this: House Joint Resolution 6, which would hamstring Ohio citizens' ability to amend the constitution at the ballot.

Secretary LaRose and sponsor Rep. Brian Stewart are undoubtedly aware that groups of Ohioans are working on ballot initiatives to protect abortion rights, raise the minimum wage and fix our deeply flawed redistricting process. Could the sudden urgency to pass HJR 6 be because LaRose, Stewart and other supporters know that Ohioans have very different views on these issues than they do?

In fact, Ohioans' opinions often diverge from those of our elected officials. For example, Policy Matters recently commissioned Data for Progress to poll Ohioans on an array of issues. After years of tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, lawmakers are talking seriously about abolishing the state income tax. Yet 71% of people polled said they'd like the wealthiest Ohioans to contribute more. In 2006

Ohioans came together to raise the minimum wage and peg it to inflation, but it's woefully short of where it was a half century ago. Sixty percent of people polled said they support a \$15 minimum wage, but lawmakers have allowed bills to raise the wage to sit in committee. In fact, it took a citizen-led amendment to raise the minimum wage in 2006.

By passing HJR 6, you'd be wiping away more than a century of majority rule in our state — and thumbing your nose at the will of the people. You'd signal to the people who have entrusted you to govern that you don't respect their voices, and you don't value their freedom. And without that mutual respect, our entire system of government can falter. Instead, you can be the leaders who show the nation that in Ohio, our elected officials respect the will of the people, even if it sometimes differs from their own. You can show the nation that in Ohio, our freedoms still matter.