



Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

**Opponent Testimony of Spencer Dirrig, Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund
House Bill 1
Ohio House Government Oversight Committee
May 29, 2024**

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey and Members of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on House Bill 1 (H.B. 1), legislation on Campaign Finance Law regarding foreign nationals and statewide initiatives. At the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund, we know **a healthy and inclusive democracy is essential for a healthy environment**. We **oppose** legislation designed to **restrict the power and freedom of Ohioans** to organize and participate in democratic processes.

The **voices being silenced** by this legislation belong to **real people** who genuinely desire to improve their communities. My grandparents took the little money they had and brought my mother to this country because they believed America was the shining beacon of freedom and democracy. Unquestionably, becoming a United States citizen was the best day of their lives, and they treasured that accomplishment immensely. But that process is long and arduous. They spent 8 and 14 years, respectively, in this nation **before becoming citizens**. Throughout that time, they donated to nonprofit organizations, organized community members to support one another, and supported issues they cared deeply about. This legislation is antithetical to the democracy my family and many others came here to experience.

The OEC Action Fund supports **more disclosure and transparency** in campaign finance, whether regarding ballot initiatives or electoral candidates. Such disclosure requirements should be **evenly applied to all organizations**, ensuring transparency in Ohio elections. Those disclosure requirements should **not be designed around targeting immigrants** and the organizations they support.

H.B. 1's language creating "alternative political organizations" and their associated disclosure requirements are **not actually about ballot initiative transparency**—they are designed to chill grassroots organizations supporting ballot initiatives and **punish them** for inclusively working with immigrants in their communities.

If this body would like to *truly* improve transparency by increasing disclosure across the board for organizations and individuals that engage in political expenditures, **we'd welcome that**. This legislation is a **targeted effort** to attack a **small subset** of individuals and organizations—and it's being presented in **bad faith**.

It's crucial to note that the **contribution of foreign money to influence domestic elections is already illegal under federal law**, and these restrictions **already apply to state elections**. However, H.B. 1 goes beyond these necessary measures and instead, it aims to **impose complex restrictions on local, citizen-led organizations that support ballot initiatives**. Non-profit organizations, including those that support environmental causes, receive donations from a variety of sources, and not all of them are

necessarily U.S. citizens. This legislation, if enacted, would not only **stifle the voices of immigrants** but also **hinder their ability to support causes** that directly impact them, even before they can vote.

Donations from foreign sources in other countries are already regulated by federal law—any legislation specifically targeting those sources would be **duplicative**. Thus, this bill is unnecessary for a more narrowly tailored purpose and, in its broad form, restricts the First Amendment rights of Ohioans. **Of import, U.S. residents who are not yet U.S. citizens are still afforded rights under the U.S. Constitution.**

As demonstrated during the August special election last year, Ohioans cherish their right to use ballot initiatives when necessary to make changes in our state. They are ready and willing to act in defense of our democracy. **This bill should be called what it is—an attack on Ohioans to organize, regardless of citizenship status.**

Given the negative implications of H.B. 1, we **strongly urge all members** of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee to **vote against this bill**. It's crucial that we protect the rights and voices of all Ohioans.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Spencer E. Dirrig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "D".

Spencer E. Dirrig
Director, Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund