

My name is Patti Longville. I have lived at 540 Stanton Ave. for 36 years. I come before you this evening to urge you to act on behalf of the citizens of Akron by rejecting any Charter Review Commission recommendations that reduce or limit the power of the people as currently codified in our Charter.

REGARDING OUR CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAW:

In 1998, the voters overwhelmingly adopted our current law. The goal of that citizen initiative action was to take "big money" out of our political campaigns, creating more competition among candidates. It has proven to be effective. Over the past decade, dozens of new candidates have run for city office and many have won. Many of you sitting here tonight were newly elected last year. For the first time in twenty years, our city saw a contested Democratic mayoral primary election just three years ago. Our campaign finance reform legislation was significantly responsible for that election. Real competition providing real choice was present for the first time in two decades as a direct result of our campaign finance reform legislation. Research by Thomas Stratmann and the Brennan Center for Justice shows that "in real world elections, the benefits of low contribution limits largely redound to challengers." This research was compiled from 42 states over 26 years, from 1980-2006.

Our current campaign finance language does not limit how much money a candidate can collect, only how much a candidate can collect from any one donor so that a candidate can not be "bought" by the highest bidder. Prior to passage of our 1998 law, one perennial mayoral candidate was able to collect large campaign contributions and since he rarely had any viable competition, he was able to contribute to the campaigns of the ward candidates whom he wished to see elected. Did this contribute to a separation of the executive and legislative branches as was the intent of our country's founders? Did this contribute to power generating with the people and flowing up rather than power being held by a few and stingily shared? Of course not. Our campaign finance reform legislation fixed that problem.

Please do not vote to make any changes in the contribution limits established by our Charter and upheld and clarified by the courts. It is the provision that makes every voter as important as every other voter. It is the provision that makes poor citizens as powerful as wealthy citizens when candidates are elected to office.

REGARDING OUR CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND CITIZEN REFERENDUM LAWS:

There are few opportunities provided in our Charter for citizens to exercise direct democracy. Our citizen initiative provision is one and our citizen referendum provision is another. As I sat in on two Charter Review Commission meetings, I heard discussion about changing the signature requirements for these two citizen measures. Currently, the required number of signatures for executing these provisions is tied to the number of electors who actually took the time to vote at the last general election. What I heard in the Charter Review Commission meetings was an intent to change the language so that the number of required signatures would be tied to the number of people who were merely registered to vote at the time of the last general election. If this change is adopted, the threshold for citizens being able to conduct successful initiative or referendum campaigns

becomes almost impossible to achieve. Again, is it the intent of the Commission or the Council or the Mayor (who appointed the Commission members) to greatly limit the power of the people, creating a dictatorship-like form of government for our city where power is held closely by only a few and the majority is shut out from being able to exercise any form of direct democracy?

In the almost forty years that I have lived in Akron, I can count on one hand the number of initiative actions which have made it to the ballot and I can't think of a single referendum action that has been on a ballot. Our current Charter language which provides for limited opportunities for citizens to engage in direct democracy has worked well and, in fact, has been used by the people on rare occasion. The language is not "broken" so it does not need to be "fixed". Our Charter language uses the same standard for signatures that the state of Ohio does. If that standard—tying the number of required signatures to the number of actual voters rather than the number of registered voters—has worked for Akron and has worked for Ohio, I urge you not to seek to change it.