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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Ohio Supreme Court Shamefully Denies Due Process in Voting Rights Case of Medina City Citizens**

Today the Ohio Supreme Court denied the voting rights of the citizens of Medina City who had been wrongfully blocked from the ballot, as 47 registered voters had their signatures wrongfully invalidated by the Medina County Board of Elections in relation to the referendum petition on Medina City Ordinance 112-19 passed by Medina City Council on July 8, 2019. The Supreme Court went against its own precedent from just three years ago in which they granted Mandamus Action in a similar case of non-matching signatures.

OCA President Chris Long made the following statement, "This is a sad day for the voting rights of Ohio citizens. As an organization that has encouraged voter participation and voter education, it is disheartening to see the State's highest court deny due process to my fellow Ohio citizens. This is a clarion call to all grassroots public policy citizen groups across Ohio that encourage voter participation by way of initiative petition, referendum, charter amendment, and Constitutional amendment. With today's decision, that is all in jeopardy, as the Court has now set a precedent that corrupt, biased partisans who work the boards of elections can discriminately invalidate duly registered voters from petitions at the whim of what they consider "non-matching signature" in violation of voters' rights. This may not be the end of the road for this case.

Voting rights are a national federal issue, and we may consider a federal lawsuit. I say emphatically – shame on the Ohio Supreme Court. Many will be watching this case and have lost faith in the judiciary as a result. We may now seek relief through the federal courts, as many have encouraged us to do. The stakes are just too high. In a time when our civil liberties are being suspended, the state's highest court should know better than to send this message during a time that many consider to be a Constitutional crisis. At the end of the day, these are elected officials. We won't be voting for them in November."

A brief history of the case- When City Council passed Ordinance 112-19, the citizens exercised their right to circulate a petition of referendum to place the measure on the ballot for the people to decide. The Concerned Citizens of Medina City Committee and volunteers collected 1,173 referendum petition signatures and submitted them to Medina City Finance Director Keith Dirham on July 31, 2019. He held the petitions for ten days, and then forwarded them to the Medina County Board of Elections. The Board of Elections reviewed the petitions and then issued its report that 260 petition signatures had been invalidated, bringing the total valid signatures to 939, forty-four short of what is needed to place the measure on the ballot.

However, upon review by the citizens committee after obtaining a public records request of the Board's findings, it was discovered that 59 signatures had been disqualified for what the board termed "non-matching signatures." The citizens committee then secured forty-seven sworn affidavits with photocopy ID evidence from petition signers whose signatures had been invalidated, attesting that it indeed was their signature on the referendum petition.

On November 18<sup>th</sup> Marie Nauth, a registered elector in the City of Medina and a signer of the referendum petition, submitted the Petition Protest Appeal along with the forty-seven sworn affidavits with proof of identity to the Medina County Board of Elections. The Medina County Board of Elections took no action in response to the citizens' request for a hearing. After exhausting every possible avenue of appeal, the voting citizens of Medina City represented in this lawsuit had no recourse but to file suit to secure their voting rights.

It is clear that the rights of these voters have been denied. These forty-seven voters represent a cross section of Americans. They are young and old, they are women and men, they are minorities, and they are veterans. They have all had their voting rights denied by Medina county officials and now by the Ohio State Supreme Court. At a time when we are encouraging voter participation, this decision sends the wrong message.

ALL SEVEN JUSTICES VOTED AGAINST VOTER RIGHTS -

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