

Budget Testimony
Tim Ward
Ohio Association of Election Officials
April 26, 2017



Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Tim Ward and I am President of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAE). I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present testimony on HB 49, the state biennial budget. I am pleased to be joined today by Commissioners Gary Lee and Dan Troy from the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO). CCAO has been an invaluable partner to my association as we have looked for creative ways to tighten our belts and more efficiently utilize taxpayer resources.

It is in a somewhat awkward fashion that I humbly approach this committee with hat in hand to ask for your assistance in solving a problem of imminent concern to OAE, the replacement of our aging voting equipment. The County Commissioners' testimony does an excellent job of outlining the thoughtful process we have undertaken to quantify the scope and severity of this situation. So rather than focus on that, I will endeavor to outline how we arrived at the decision to seek state assistance with regard to our voting equipment and why we believe it is so critical.

In 2002, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Amongst numerous other changes, HAVA required states to update their voting equipment to meet several criteria that most equipment at the time could not accommodate. With a state match in hand, Ohio drew down nearly \$115 million in federal funds and began acquiring new election equipment which was deployed in 2005 and 2006. Since then, the vast majority of Ohio counties have not updated this equipment, which incidentally was based on largely outdated technology at the time of purchase.

Imagine for a minute using the same cell phone or laptop that you did in 2005. And oh by the way, iPhone was not even available yet! Imagine trying to find parts to keep that equipment running, or even trying to find a company that supports 12-year old software to keep it updated and fresh. This is the situation we now face as election officials trying to manage and maintain the all-important machines that tabulate our votes. We have literally used paperclips and floppy disks to keep our equipment running. We scour the internet for used parts and pieces because our vendors no longer keep them in stock. We dutifully pay maintenance and repair contracts praying that the machines will go just one more election. The situation is now dire and that is why we are here.

CCAO can eloquently enumerate the challenges facing county budgets in 2017, but suffice to say money is scarce for replacing our voting systems. This is why we are humbly requesting state assistance in the efforts to modernize our voting equipment. I know the legislature is deluged with requests for money, and we do not enter into this request lightly. It is imperative for the sanctity of our elections process that we replace our voting systems prior to the 2020 election cycle. Our machines are on their last legs, and it is past the point of optional to undertake this effort. We are truly hopeful that the legislature will consider this request.

It is worth mentioning that Ohio is not alone in this situation. Every other state in the country is struggling with this problem, and many are looking to state and local partnerships to bridge the funding gap. Congress has been unresponsive to the pleas of states and locals to assist us in updating our equipment. Many stories have been written in the press that discuss this topic and how election jurisdictions are responding.

One final note. OAEO is extraordinarily grateful that the legislature has appropriated money to assist counties in purchasing electronic poll books. This state-local partnership has yielded extraordinary results for Ohio's voters who have seen a much smoother and efficient voting experience. Election officials have reaped the results of this enhanced technology as well. We hope this program will serve as a model for replacing our voting systems. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.