

House Bill 41 – Sponsor Testimony
House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
Representative Dorothy Pelanda
March 15, 2017

Chairman Blessing, Vice-Chairman Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee - thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 41 today.

HB 41 updates a variety of voter laws in the state of Ohio. Specifically, the bill will modify laws regarding challenges to voter registrations, appointment of observers, and the procedures for processing absent voter's ballots and for casting absent voter's ballots in person.

This bill truly represents a win-win for everyone in the elections process. It will give in-person absentee voters the opportunity to scan their ballots before they cast them to check for mistakes - a process they cannot avail themselves to now. It will reduce the paperwork that in-person absentee voters must complete, thereby saving time and reducing lines at our early voting locations around Ohio. In fact, one county board of elections shared with me that they believe they can reduce the time it takes to process these voters from 3 minutes to 30 seconds if these changes are enacted. Finally, it saves taxpayer dollars by eliminating this superfluous paperwork which costs boards of elections hundreds of thousands of dollars to print each election.

The LSC analysis does a great job of outlining the specific changes HB 41 makes to election law. For our purposes today, let me summarize them by saying that all the changes are intended to allow in-person absentee voters to enjoy the streamlined process of voting that our Election Day voters now enjoy. The changes make imminent sense. In-person absentee voters resemble Election Day voters much more than those who mail their ballots in. They are presenting themselves in person and they are checked in by an election official. The normal safeguards inherent in a mail-in system of voting are simply not necessary for these voters.

Let me briefly discuss the current process for in-person absentee voting and how it would change under this bill. Currently, an in-person absentee voter goes to the board of elections to vote, they are required to fill out an absentee ballot application and an absentee ballot envelope just the same as a mail-in voter. They are then handed a ballot which they fill out and place in that envelope. Their ballot is held until shortly before the election, when it is then scanned, but not counted until Election Day. Under this bill, this paperwork would be eliminated. The voter would simply present any of the currently valid forms of identification for Election Day voters (drivers' license or state ID, bank statement, utility bill, government document, etc). They would be handed their ballot, and run it through an optical scanner after they complete it. As mentioned above, the scanner would provide feedback immediately if the voter has made a mistake. The ballot would then be held, but not counted until Election Day.

It is my belief that the language contained in HB 41 enacts common sense and much needed reforms to our absentee voter and registration laws. My office has been working and will continue to work closely with the Ohio Association of Elections Officials and other interested parties as this legislation moves forward.

One final note for the committee's consideration. It has come to my attention that as drafted, in-person absentee voters who do not have an acceptable form of ID would be required to cast a provisional ballot. It is not my intent for this to happen. Therefore, I am drafting an amendment that would allow these voters to present Election Day identification OR fill out an absentee application that contains alternative forms of ID such as their last four digits of their social security number. In either case the voter would be allowed to then cast a regular ballot.

I appreciate your attention to my testimony today and would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.