



**State Representative Derek Merrin
District 47**

**House Bill 342 – Sponsor Testimony
Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
October 11, 2017**

Chairman Blessing, Vice-Chairman Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee. Thank you for allowing me present testimony for House Bill 342. The legislation has two parts. First, it prohibits tax levies and bond issues in August special elections. Secondly, it updates antiquated ballot language by having millage expressed in terms of \$100,000 of property value. Current law has millage expressed in \$100 increments of property value.

Tax levies and bond issues have a long-term impact imposing years of financial responsibility on citizens. These critical issues should be determined in regular elections, not special elections in August. House Bill 342 still permits local governments two opportunities to place levies or bond issues on the ballot annually, which is sufficient. Under current law, over a three-year period local governments can force voters to vote on the same issue nine times. Subjecting citizens to vote on the same issue until a legislative authority gets its desired outcome (passage) is poor public policy and undemocratic. It would be unthinkable to hold elections for the same political office nine times in three years. By constantly holding elections, it undermines the democratic process by effectively erasing voters' decisions within a few months.

During August elections in 2016, the elections generated about a 22% voter turnout with some elections triggering single digit turnouts. The lowest turnout rates occurred in highly populated, urban areas of the state. The low turnouts should give pause to whether the elections truly represent the majority of citizens. By holding obscure elections in the summer, it reduces voter participation, as many voters are unaware an election is taking place. The low voter participation alone should have us reevaluate allowing elections in August. With voter turnout rates so dismal and regular elections available, why do local governments put levies and bond on August ballot? There is a reason why we have regular elections with set dates, because we do not want election dates selected to secure an advantage or as a method to bypass the will of the majority.

Furthermore, the bill makes a simple but important update to how ballot language reads. Beginning in 1939, the Ohio Revised Code requires the proposed millage expressed in terms of \$100 of property valuation to help voters understand the fiscal impact of levies. It was a great idea. However, values of homes have changed, but the Ohio Revised Code has not. This legislation will modernize the language by having millage expressed in terms of \$100,000 of property value rather the outdated requirement of \$100 of property valuation.

While voting, Ohioans should not need a calculator. Under current law, a voter has to take the dollar amount based on \$100 and multiple it by the value of their property. For example, if a levy costs \$0.68 per \$100 of value and a voter's home was valued at \$125,000, the voter would need to multiple \$0.68 by 1,250 to determine the personal, fiscal impact of the levy. Rather it is the media or political advertisements, its standard practice to express levies in relation to \$100,000 in property value. When it comes to ballot language, our goal should be to provide clear, accurate, and relevant information providing voters clarity. I hope the committee agrees that House Bill 342 is a positive step toward achieving that goal.

I hope you join me in supporting this legislation. I welcome any questions the committee members may have at this time.