

**Proponent Testimony**  
**SB 21**  
**Ohio Association of Election Officials**

Chairman Blessing, ranking member Clyde and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee:

On behalf of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEO), we are pleased to offer our association's bipartisan support for SB 21. The trustees of our organization have reviewed this legislation and voted unanimously to back this bill.

It is important to note that SB 21 was amended in the Senate to remove a provision requiring boards of elections to send notices to individuals who have appeared on our list of deceased voters. While we continue to believe that this requirement of law is unnecessary, we did not oppose its removal from this otherwise important piece of legislation.

The rest of the legislation deals with precinct election officials, commonly known as poll workers or booth workers. SB 21 gives boards of elections flexibility to reduce the number of poll workers at voting locations that 1) contain multiple precincts and 2) utilize electronic poll books. As members of this committee are certainly aware, the legislature recently appropriated nearly \$14 million to partner with counties to purchase electronic poll books. To date 83 of Ohio's 88 counties have participated in this highly successful program. The result has been to modernize our election system, save taxpayer dollars, ease the administration of elections for boards of elections and poll workers, and greatly enhance our voters' experience at the polls. OAEO wholeheartedly thanks the General Assembly for making this possible.

Another recent change that has benefited our voters was the move to “any line, any time” voting. In short, when a voter enters his or her polling location, they no longer have to report directly to their precinct table to receive their ballot. This is because we are now able to put every voter assigned to that entire voting location into one electronic poll book. In the past, each precinct had its own poll books that contained only voters assigned to that particular precinct. Hence, a voter had to check-in at their exact precinct table or be redirected to their correct table. With two or more electronic poll books deployed at a location, and each containing the names of all registered voters in that location, voters can step up to the first available book, check in, and be handed their correct ballot or assigned to a voting machine.

The result of any line, any time voting and the utilization of electronic poll books has made our polling places extraordinarily efficient. For example, we are now able to check voters in quickly, in a matter of seconds rather than minutes. And the check-in process that used to require two poll workers per precinct can now be accomplished with only two or three workers per voting location. In some counties that have up to six precincts in one location, the need for poll workers to perform this function has gone from as many as twelve to as few as three.

Finally, early absentee voting has been a boon to our Election Day voting process. Many counties will see upwards of 30% of their voters cast a ballot prior to Election Day. This change to Ohio law was made to specifically address the long lines that occurred in some counties in 2004. The results have been exactly as intended. Less people voting on Election Day means less chance for backups at the polls.

Electronic poll books also create other efficiencies. E-poll books have the ability to look up voters who are in the wrong location and identify their correct voting location. They can even print off directions for the voter. This function that used to take a poll worker several minutes and entailed thumbing through a phone book sized document is now done with the click of a button. And as you can imagine, human error is greatly reduced in this process. E-poll books also immediately flag provisional voters, print receipts that instruct poll workers which ballot to give to the voter, and have the ability to scan a voters' drivers license in order to pull up his or her voter file. All of these used to be human endeavors and all have been automated. The effect, as you can clearly see, is efficiency and accuracy, both of which are of great benefit to poll workers and voters alike.

As a backdrop to these efficiencies is the real plight of boards of elections to recruit and retain qualified and capable poll workers. It is no secret that our poll worker population is aging, with the average age of our poll workers being close to 70. It is also true that poll workers represent our single largest Election Day expense. Ask any board of elections what their top five greatest challenges are and I guarantee every one of them will list poll workers. In the past, the legislature has been helpful to our requests for assistance in dealing with these issues. In the early 2000's, the legislature approved a pay raise for poll workers. You have also granted public entities the ability to release their employees to work at the polls without having to take a vacation day. Finally, you have allowed 17 year-olds to work the polls, which has led to the creation of several highly successful youth at the booth programs around the state. SB 21 is the next, critical step this body can take to help us with this problem.

Let us close by addressing some concerns that were raised in the Senate. First, you should all be aware that the legislature has already allowed boards of elections to reduce the number of poll workers by up to 50% for special elections. This authority comes without the requirements of SB 21 to use e-poll books and only reduce poll workers at multi-precinct locations. We are aware of no problems arising from this current allowance. Second, this legislation in no way effects the requirement that polling locations be staffed in a bipartisan way. Should SB 21 pass, those portions of the law are still in full effect. Third, the legislation is permissive at the discretion of local boards of elections. Thus, any reduction of poll workers would be done in a bipartisan way and with the knowledge and consent of both major political parties. Finally, and most importantly, passing this legislation will not lead to increased lines. We have already outlined extensively the efficiencies we have gained in recent years. It is a fact that we can process the same number of voters in less time, using less people.

OAEO would like to thank Senator Uecker for his sponsorship of this legislation and leadership on this issue. Mr. Chairman we truly appreciate the committee's time and attention to this bill, and urge its passage.

Jocelyn Bucaro, President, Ohio Association of Election Officials

Rob Frost, First Vice-President, Ohio Association of Election Officials