



March 27, 2019

Proponent Testimony to Senate Bill 30
House Committee on State and Local Government

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Ginter, Ranking Member Kelly, and esteemed members of the Committee:

Thank you for having me today. I am the Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio, and I'm here representing our members in support of SB 30.

Ohio has a long, rich history regarding women's suffrage, and Megan Wood of the Ohio History Connection will share some highlights. But I would like to offer a slightly different history lesson, given that our organization is a direct descendant of Ohio women suffragists.

After the Civil War, many hoped that women would be granted suffrage just as former male slaves were given the franchise through the 15th Amendment. By the 1870s, there were more than 30 different women's suffrage organizations across the Buckeye State, but there was no structure for statewide collaboration among the groups. In May 1885 the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association (OWSA) was formed in Painesville, with the goal of securing women's suffrage through state policy. OWSA did not work much with national groups, because most national women's suffrage groups did not allow women of color to join, and OWSA was racially integrated.

Women's Suffrage Policy Timeline in Ohio

1894: Ohio allows women to vote in school board races.

1904 and 1905: State-level legislative attempts to provide women full voting rights fail in committee.

1908: Legislation for full women's suffrage is voted out of committee, but never makes it to the statehouse floor.

1910: Women's suffrage makes it out of committee, but fails during the floor vote.

1912 and 1914: Amendments are brought to and fail at the ballot box.

1916 and 1917: Suffragists change approaches by focusing on municipal suffrage campaigns. Some local initiatives pass, but then are deemed unconstitutional by the courts.

1917: A law to enable women in Ohio to vote in Presidential elections is passed and then repealed.

1919: Ohio became one of the first states to ratify the 19th Amendment in June 1919.

1920: Ohio suffragists help lead the effort for national ratification, since both Presidential candidates are from Ohio (Warren Harding of Marion and James Cox of Dayton).

1920: Full ratification. Women receive the right to vote, and the first US President to be elected under universal suffrage for women is an Ohioan, Warren Harding.

1920: Florence Allen (OWSA/LWVO) is the first female judge to be elected in the United States, then winning a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court in 1922.

Also in 1920, at the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association Convention in the Southern Hotel in downtown Columbus, the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association transforms into the League of Women Voters of Ohio. Our founding mothers represented diverse sectors of Ohio women: nurses, teachers, letter carriers, business owners, newspaper reporters, and even groups like the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and Daughters of the American Revolution. LWVO's mission was to empower voters to know how to vote and to be informed voters.

From the beginning, we were a diverse and accomplished group, and making a more perfect union has always been the focus of our work, especially through the engagement of voters. The League's nonpartisan voter guide is celebrated and utilized by voters across the country, and that was actually started right here in the Buckeye State during the 1920s.

Our vision for the 19th Amendment centennial celebrations is that there will be events big and small in every community across Ohio such as book talks, photography exhibits, school programs, and live performances. We also hope that Ohioans will be inspired by this rich history in a way that encourages them to never take the sacred right of voting for granted. We also believe that celebrating the 19th Amendment gives us the ability to recognize women trailblazers in Ohio who were able to become judges, legislators, business leaders, and scientists after winning this essential right.

We ask you to expedite this bill, and we look forward to working with the Commission, the Secretary of State, and key partners in celebrating Ohio's rich history as well as our sacrosanct right to vote. If you would like to discuss this or other efforts, please contact me at director@lwvohio.org or 614-469-1505. Thank you.