



Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of Secretary LaRose on House Bill 540. This bill considers another solution to a complicated problem that the Secretary has been working on for years – how to utilize technology to modernize Ohio’s registration system to make it more accurate, reduce the risk of voter fraud, institute better citizenship checks, improve efficiency at county boards of elections, and provide Ohio voters the confidence they deserve in their election system.

This modernization utilizes current technology that, when considering Ohio’s out-of-date registration system, is certainly necessary. It’s important to remember that our voter rolls are highly dynamic as every day Ohioans create new registrations, abandon old ones, and constantly submit new information. Voters may move out of state, register multiple times at a new addresses, pass away, or change last names as a result of a marriage or another life event. The result is the same – thousands of abandoned registrations that clog up the voter rolls and leave counties more vulnerable to voter fraud. Thankfully, voter fraud is rare and we have many ways to thwart attempts, but it is our responsibility to improve the registration system to keep it that way.

To preserve the integrity and efficiency of our elections, both state and federal law require Ohio to maintain accurate voter lists. The state and federal laws that require voter list maintenance were written decades ago and have withstood various legal challenges. Yet these older laws, as we have seen with others in the information age, are not keeping up with the pace of technology to both improve the system and take advantage of it. Keeping an accurate registered voter list is a responsibility that has been carried out by Republican and Democratic Secretaries of State in Ohio for decades. However, it’s clearer than ever that our great state, a focus of national elections, is relying on an unsophisticated voter registration system that has become less of a tool for registering and updating voter information, and more of a political talking point. To be clear, in the year 2020 we should not have to wait for six years of inactivity before knowing that a particular registration is a duplicate or an abandoned registration corresponding with a deceased or relocated voter.

The status quo is antiquated and the time to replace it is now. Our outdated system reduces voter confidence, creates opportunities for fraud, and slows government efficiency. The process to keep accurate voter rolls relies on out-of-date mechanisms that allow for inactive registrations to remain on the books for years. Additionally, all 88 county boards of elections are forced to spend a significant amount of time and workforce resources attempting to manage this archaic system. There is a better way.

Just as retailers have long collected information from consumers at each point of sale, it’s time for our registration system to work the same way.

Utilizing the BMV provides value for this proposed system not simply because of the sheer number of Ohioans interacted with on a daily basis, but also because of the time required between renewing a driver license or state ID.

Utilizing the BMV for this proposed system has two particularly positive benefits: 1) the extremely high percentage of Ohioans who are eligible to vote that use their services; and 2) the four-year ID renewal requirement pairs well with six-year range required for voter activity. As you'll recall with voter list maintenance, registrants who do not have any voting activity for six years are at risk of cancellation. However, a driver license or state ID must be renewed every four years. Therefore, as registrants obtain or renew their driver license every four years, they will automatically reset their clock for voter activity with their latest information – thereby ensuring far greater accuracy of voter lists and improving efficiency.

This new system also makes it far more likely that only U.S. citizens are registered to vote. Current procedures require an annual review of the voter rolls to determine the citizenship of Ohioans registered to vote. Unfortunately, this process is carried out retroactively, meaning some non-citizens could become registered to vote, perhaps even inadvertently. By checking for citizenship on the front end, before any vote can be cast, we'll be doing more to ensure only eligible citizens become registered voters in Ohio.

At a time when voter confidence in our election system is waning due to threats from foreign adversaries and misinformation, HB 540 will give Ohioans faith that their sacred American voting system is secure and accurate. According to data provided by the U.S. Census and Ohio's own voter registration database, over 90 percent of Ohioans are already registered to vote. And yet, more than 130,000 people were required to vote provisionally in the 2016 general election. A modernized registration system could drastically reduce that number. The high number of Ohioans already registered is a strong indicator that HB 540 won't necessarily increase the number of registered voters. However, it will significantly improve voter roll accuracy which will decrease the number of voters required to cast their ballot provisionally. Voters must have confidence in the ability of their state and local governments to administer elections effectively and properly. HB 540 will go a long way to making sure that happens.

While we applaud the House and Representative Manning for taking up such an important issue, I would be remiss if I didn't point out a few minor issues we uncovered while reviewing the language. I will also offer a couple of suggested changes that I feel would help create the modern, secure, and efficient system we all are looking for in Ohio.

Currently, this bill allows for just one year to create and implement the automated registration and verification system. While some may consider this a reasonable timeframe, experiences in other states most certainly suggest otherwise. Over the past several years states like California, who tried to rush their timeline, and West Virginia, who wasn't prepared for the vast complexities that came with overhauling their system, experienced significant struggles in making their system operational. They learned that if you place an unattainable date on such an

overhaul it will lead to a broken system rife with flaws. For this reason, we ask that the committee amend the effective date to two years after the first January.

If Ohio were to pass this bill and finally modernize how we register eligible citizens to vote, we would be the 20th state to do so. This list includes states that cross geographical and political divides. From California to Georgia, states have begun to see positive effect on not only maintaining accurate voter rolls but on building greater voter confidence. What the vast majority of these states have in common is a point of sale opt-out, meaning that the customer is afforded the opportunity to decline registering to vote while they are still at the BMV.

This brings me to the second suggested change, creating a bifurcated process which separates out those who are registered to vote from those who are not.

This will allow those who are already registered to vote simply have their address seamlessly updated during their transaction. These voters will be given the chance to correct any errors when they receive the acknowledgement notice from their Board of Elections.

For those who are not registered to vote, the language allows for the use of technology to modernize how the process works and maintains the point of sale opt-out. We achieve this by utilizing an electronic screen capable of registering signatures as well as offering a chance for the person to affirm their legal voting status.

I want to thank Representative Manning for bringing forth this important issue. With the above recommended changes, Secretary LaRose stands ready to implement this new system.

Thank you for your time today, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.