

Sponsor Testimony on Ohio House Bill 309 *Absentee Ballots Missing Postmarks*

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Rezabek and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 309 (HB 309), legislation amending Ohio law so that voters whose absentee ballots delivered to the board of elections without a postmark by the appropriate date will have their vote counted.

Last year, I was contacted by a number of election officials, advocates and voters themselves who said current law has led to a high number of absentee ballots being rejected due to a missing postmark. In Portage County, the area I represent, we saw at least 19 ballots thrown out in the 2015 primary election alone. Consider a general election across the whole state—that number becomes a whole lot larger.

Under current law, voters must have their absentee ballots received by their local county board of elections prior to the close of polls on Election Day, or have it postmarked no later than the day before the election and received by the board of elections no later than 10 days after the election. However, some voters who follow the law and mail their ballots on time still have their ballots thrown out due to a missing postmark. They're effectively disenfranchised through no fault of their own.

HB 309 will ensure that we count every ballot that is mailed on time, even if the post office neglects to postmark the envelope. Ballots received postmarked or signed by the voter on or after Election Day will continue not to be counted.

While the Ohio secretary of state's office does not report the number of absentee ballots that go uncounted due to missing postmarks, the number of ballots rejected for not arriving on time included 6,096 ballots in November 2012 and 6,670 ballots in November 2014. Some portion of those rejected ballots were tossed for missing postmarks.

With 70 elections having been decided by just one vote in the last two years, throwing out even one ballot over a missing postmark harms the integrity of our elections. Passing HB 309, a simple bill with a common sense fix Ohio's postmark problem, will protect the integrity of our elections and give voters peace of mind knowing that if they do what they're supposed to, their ballot will count.

Thank you again for providing me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on this bill and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.