

**TESTIMONY TO THE
GENERAL GOVERNMENT AND AGENCY REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
SENATOR KRIS JORDAN, CHAIR
MAY 9, 2017**

Chairman Jordan and members of the General Government and Agency Review Subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee, good day. I am Philip C. Richter, Executive Director of the Ohio Elections Commission, and am giving testimony on behalf of the Commission regarding our budget for the next biennium. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the subcommittee on behalf of the Commission.

Since the Ohio Elections Commission commenced operations as an independent state agency on January 1, 1996, over 18,000 cases have been filed with the Commission. In addition, 67 advisory opinions have been issued, with two more opinions issued in 2015 and 4 issued in 2016.

The Commission carries out its mission with only three (3) employees; myself as Executive Director and Staff Attorney, and 2 administrative assistants. Along with the 7 Commission members, comprised of three (3) Democrats, three (3) Republicans and one (1) independent, the ten (10) persons on the Commission's payroll consume well over 80% of the Commission's total budget. Although small, the staff of the Commission has been able to efficiently and effectively handle the array of cases filed with the Commission on a consistent basis. The Commission's caseload has been fairly consistent since the Commission became an independent agency, aside from losing jurisdiction over Ohio's false statement statutes in recent years. I anticipate that the Commission will continue to have a steady caseload of campaign finance related cases from the boards of elections and the office of the Secretary of State well into the future.

As with the Commission staff, the operational needs of the Commission have been fairly consistent, increasing only because of rising prices, such as higher postage costs, increased health insurance premiums, increasing media costs and other transfers, which are all beyond the control of Commission personnel. My staff and I have worked diligently to limit the Commission's expenditure levels. Further, salary increases have been limited throughout the Commission's existence with staff receiving only step increases and my salary has only being increased once, in 2012, in almost 10 years. The Commission has consistently met its obligations with fewer and fewer dollars and greater reliance on the Elections Commission Fund. This prospective budget reflects an appropriate, yet limited, increase for the Commission that will simply allow the Commission and its staff to maintain its basic operations but does include a more realistic reliance on the Elections Commission Fund, based on the historic level of receipts to that fund that the Commission has received over 21 years. After essentially receiving cuts in the previous 3 budgets, commencing in the mid-2000s, this recommended amount will allow the Commission to effectively operate, though it is still less than the Commission was allotted in fiscal year 2009, further decreased by the 1.5% reduction imposed by the House of Representatives.

There are a variety of factors that have allowed the Commission to live within its means during recent budget cycles. One staff member, who over the first 10 years of the Commission's operations was a full-time employee, has been working part-time; off and on, the Commission experienced periods where it operated with less than a full contingent of members, saving the operational budget \$30,000 in 2013, \$4100 in 2012, \$18,000 in 2011, \$12,500 in 2010, \$14,500 in 2009 and \$12,500 in 2008. Moving into the Riffe Center in 2015 will save approximately \$20,000 per year from the Commission's previous location. I believe that I, and my staff, have

been very responsible with the funds supplied to me to carry out the functions of the Commission, often to my own detriment.

I believe that this budget recommendation on behalf of the Commission will continue to represent the frugal approach in which this Commission has conducted its operations since becoming an independent agency and reflects the economical manner in which the Commission will continue to maintain its operations through the biennium. Through difficult budget times the Commission has continued to move cases through its processes and continues to perform its basic functions in an efficient and effective manner.

On behalf of the seven members of the Elections Commission, I again want to thank you for the opportunity to address this honorable subcommittee. I will do my best to answer any additional questions that you may have regarding the Commission, its current budget, this budget request, and our overall operations.

Thank you very much.