

Testimony of CCAO President Daniel P. Troy
Senate Bill 135

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

No one can argue with the fact that our system of free and open elections is an integral part of our system of government. What takes place on Election Day is the very core of our democracy; that is, the periodic selection OF and BY the people of those individuals that are charged with carrying out the responsibilities of the government FOR the people.

We certainly realize that “ground zero” of this process (from choosing township trustees to the President of the United States) takes place at our 88 Boards of Elections offices in Ohio; and we are all too well aware that the primary responsibility for funding the process rests with the Board of County Commissioners. By and large, the members of our Association take that responsibility very seriously, and have done their best not to shortchange this basic component of our democracy.

But, we are now facing the daunting, and expensive, task of replacing elections machinery that is fast nearing the end of its reliability to perform its function. Article 1, Section 4 of the United States Constitution states that the Times, Places, and Manner of holding Elections...shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations.... There is no mention of counties having responsibility for the “Manner” in which elections are conducted. But, we know that train left the station a long time ago, as we as county governments have historically borne the lion’s share of the cost of conducting elections in Ohio. What we are, however, happily seeing here today, is a true partnership between us, and the State of Ohio to address this important issue.

This apparent willingness by the General Assembly to work with our Association and the Ohio Association of Election’s Officials to address this election administration infrastructure need is certainly in the best interest of our citizens and our democracy. The pressure on county budgets to provide for the myriad components (equipment, personnel, registration, training, and now the minimization of security risks) of conducting elections has been increasing at a rate greater than our revenues.

We do truly appreciate this partnership to assist us in that mission, and we certainly hope it is just a beginning to a greatly enhanced relationship between the State and county governments in Ohio to insure the continued provision of a key element of our civilization – free and open elections.