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Senate Bill 44 Sponsor Testimony  
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee  
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Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Minority Member Yuko, distinguished members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 44, which would ensure greater transparency and accountability for local elections by allowing for campaign finance reports to be filed electronically with county boards of elections. These reports would then be made available through the secretary of state's website much like they are currently available for statewide and general assembly candidate filings. Last year this legislation passed the Senate unanimously and was reported with unanimous support by the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee.

Ohio law does not currently authorize county boards of elections to permit electronic filing, even on a voluntary basis. In 1999, the General Assembly passed a law directing the secretary of state to create an online campaign finance reporting system for candidates and campaign committees that file with that office. To date, code sections governing committees that file reports with local boards of elections have not been similarly updated, which precludes the local boards of election from providing an electronic filing option.

This bill would remove this paper-only requirement. Electronic reporting would provide easier access and transparency for the public while easing the burden on the limited auditing staff of county boards of elections. It would also make the process easier for those who file the often laborious reports.

Specifically, the bill allows local candidates to file their campaign finance reports online with the board of elections. Since 1999, the Ohio secretary of state's office has operated an online campaign finance database which provides information that is easy to search, download and analyze. If enacted, this legislation would open the same database to county boards of elections, creating access to campaign finance reports for state and local candidates in the same place for those candidates who file electronically. Adding to the current database would save the public from having to search for campaign finance data in two different places, streamline filing requirements for candidates and eliminate unnecessary paperwork for local boards of elections.

For the sake of transparency and accountability, Ohio citizens must have the ability to examine the campaign finances of the political candidates and committees that work to earn their vote. Ultimately, these facts and figures tell a more objective story than any campaign ad or speech ever could. If we hope to keep Ohio voters informed and engaged in the decisions affecting their communities, we have to use modern means of communication.

Modernizing Ohio's campaign finance law should not be a subject of contention. Put simply, this legislation would cut red tape and administrative paperwork while improving transparency in local elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.