**Proponent Testimony**

**House Bill 41**

**Ed Leonard, Ohio Association of Election Officials**

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

My name is Ed Leonard and I am the Director of the Franklin County Board of Elections. I currently serve as Legislative Co-Chair of the Ohio Association of Election Officials. I wish to express my association’s support for HB 41 and explain the reasons why I feel that this bill is so important.

The basis for HB 41 was conceived over three years ago by a bipartisan team of election officials from Hamilton County. As a county that uses optical scan voting equipment, they noticed that the process they used for voting in-person absentee voters was both cumbersome and expensive. They began to analyze the processes and procedures used to vote in-person absentee voters and see how they could be streamlined. The result is what you have before you today in HB 41. The legislation has been carefully crafted to create a win-win-win for Ohio voters, taxpayers and election administrators.

**A win for voters:**

* As drafted the bill will allow absentee voters to check in to vote in an expedited fashion by reducing unnecessary and burdensome paperwork. No longer will the voter be forced to fill out an absentee application or an absentee identification envelope. The majority of in-person absentee voters show up with ID in hand and are upset that they have to fill out this lengthy paperwork. By expanding the acceptable forms of identification to include those currently allowed, and adding others such as drivers license, utility bill or government ID, we are making it easier for voters to comply with the ID requirements. A great bi-product of this change will be to shorten lines at our early voting locations as we can now process these voters much more expeditiously. As we all know, lines are much less of an issue on Election Day thanks to our generous absentee voting system. However, lines remain an issue at our early voting locations.
* Because HB 41 eliminates the absentee ID envelope, voters will now be able to scan their ballots through a tabulating machine. This machine provides instant feedback to the voter if they have made a mistake. The voter can then fix that mistake before the ballot is dropped into the box. I cannot overstate the value and importance of this change. It will result in the enfranchisement of thousands of voters around Ohio. It is important to note that the ballot will be held under double lock and key and the results of these votes will not be tabulated or made known until 7:30 PM on Election Day (as per current law).
* Because HB 41 gets rid of superfluous paperwork, it eliminates the possibility that the voter would make a mistake on those forms.
* HB 41 also specifies that an in-person absentee voter may only be challenged by a poll worker at the time they are scanning their ballot. Currently law allows challenges to these voters to come from the public, something I believe should be done away with. Because a voter is presenting themselves in-person, the time to challenge that voter’s eligibility is at that point, and should rest with the election official, not the general public.

**A win for the taxpayers:**

* As noted above, HB 41 eliminates reams of unnecessary paperwork. Each of these forms costs boards of elections money to print, so getting rid of them will help save us money.

**A win for election administrators:**

* All of the changes mentioned above will help election officials perform their duties more efficiently. It goes without saying that the 28 days where this type of voting takes place are the busiest for us. Anything that helps us operate in a more cost-effective and time-effective manner is truly appreciated.

As you can see, this is an elections bill with a host of improvements to our system. Our bipartisan board of trustees which consists of ten Democrats and ten Republicans voted unanimously to support this bill, and we hope you will do the same. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.