

**TESTIMONY TO THE
GENERAL GOVERNMENT AND AGENCY REVIEW COMMITTEE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
SENATOR KIRK SCHURING, CHAIR
April 30, 2019**

Chairman Schuring and members of the General Government and Agency Review Committee, good morning. I am Philip C. Richter, Executive Director of the Ohio Elections Commission, and am giving testimony on behalf of the Commission regarding the Commission's 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 20,000 cases have been filed with the Commission. In addition, 70 advisory opinions have been issued, with 2 more opinions issued in 2018 and 1 issued so far in 2019.

The Commission carries out its mission with only three (3) employees; myself as Executive Director and Staff Attorney, and 2 very capable 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. The Commission has continued to have a steady caseload of campaign finance related cases submitted to us from the 88 County Boards of Elections as well as from the office of the Secretary of State in addition to complaints filed with us by individuals across the state.

As with the Commission staff, the operational needs of the Commission continue to be fairly consistent, increasing only because of rising prices, generally such as higher postage costs and increased health insurance premiums, 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 12 years. The Commission has consistently met its obligations with fewer and fewer dollars. This prospective budget reflects a consistent approach to the previous biennium and does not include an increase in the Commission appropriation from the 2019 level. This budget will simply allow the Commission to continue to maintain its basic operations and is a more realistic reliance on the Elections Commission Fund, based on the historic level of receipts to that fund. After essentially receiving cuts to its budget starting in the mid-2000s, I believe that this recommended amount will allow the Commission to effectively operate but is still less than the Commission was allotted in fiscal year 2009.

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, now works part-time; off and on, and even currently, the Commission experiences periods where it operated with less than a full contingent of members which has saved the operational budget \$4,000 currently, \$4,000 in 2017, \$16,000 in 2016, \$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 has save approximately \$20,000 per year in the Commission's budget from it's previous location in the Wyandotte Building. 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 manner in which this Commission has conducted its operations since becoming an independent agency and continues to reflect the economical manner in which the Commission will maintain its operations through this biennium. Through difficult budget times, I believe that 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, as well as our overall operations.

Thank you very much.