



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Making Ohio's Ballot Language Clear and Concise

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio Senate General Government
and Agency Review Committee
House Bill 76

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Chairman Schuring, Vice Chair Rulli, and Ranking Member O'Brien, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 76 and the importance of making local tax levy questions easier for taxpayers to understand.

My name is Greg R. Lawson, I am a research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

The Buckeye Institute continues to advocate for greater government **transparency** and has **supported** efforts such as the Treasurer of State's **Ohio Checkbook**, which includes spending for state government along with hundreds of local governments.

Policies that further promote transparency include ensuring that Ohio taxpayers can easily understand the issues they are asked to vote on, especially when they are asked whether they are willing to part with their hard-earned dollars to pay for government services. Providing taxpayers with clear, easy to follow instructions and explanations of the issue on the ballot. As Representative Merrin correctly summarized in **testimony** before the House Ways and Means Committee:

Ballot language should be clear and concise. Tax levies and bond issues should be transparent to voters. A calculator should not be necessary when voting. House Bill 76 seeks to update inconsistent ballot language that make it much easier for voters to ascertain the fiscal impact of levies and bonds.

Ohioans rightly appreciate their local governments and leaders. As members of our communities, local leaders are responsive to their constituents in ways that state and federal officials often are not. But like all government officials, local leaders must also be held accountable by the people they represent, which requires that residents be able to understand easily and adequately the decisions those officials make. This includes understanding levy and bond requests before being put to the public for a vote. Complicated and complex ballot language obscures the issues and prevents voters from making informed decisions, casting meaningful votes, and holding their representatives accountable. Ballot confusion leads to confused voter decisions that can cost taxpayers money they never intended for their government to spend.

Ballots should explain, for example, in clear and simple terms, how much revenue a levy is expected to generate so that voters—not politicians—can better decide whether the levy is worth it. Furthermore, ballot language and font styles and sizes should be uniform in order to avoid unintentionally favoring one outcome or issue.

The policies in House Bill 76 will help make ballots clearer and government's taxing and spending decisions more transparent to voters. Clarity and transparency will reinforce local accountability and, more importantly, help ensure that the votes that are cast actually reflect the true and informed will of the electorate.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have at this time.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

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