**Proponent Testimony**

**Senate Bill 191**

**LaVera Scott**

**Ohio Association of Election Officials**

Chairman Coley, ranking member Craig and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

My name is Lavera Scott. I am the Director of the Lucas County Board of Elections and a legislative co-chair of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEO). The OAEO is a bipartisan organization representing Ohio’s 88 county boards of elections and their staff members. Its mission is to promote fair, accurate and reliable elections through the education of its members, advocating for sound election policies, and communicating accurate information regarding the administration of elections. As Ohio’s elections professionals, we are proud to offer our association’s support for Senate Bill 191 and want to thank Senator Gavarone for her leadership on this legislation.

SB 191 is a simple concept; allow voters to request an absentee ballot online. It is 2020 and our voters, your constituents, live on their computers and mobile devices. They bank online, shop online, communicate online, watch TV and movies online; and in Ohio, they even register to vote online. But if a voter wants to request an absentee ballot online, that option simply does not exist.

Let me briefly describe the current options that a voter has for requesting an absentee ballot and then discuss the changes that SB 191 presents. In order to request an absentee ballot, a voter can mail a detailed request via the United State Post Office or call or stop in to a county board of elections to request an application. When a board of elections receives a request, they will then mail the application to the voter, who must complete it using a pen and paper, and mail or hand deliver it back to the board for processing. Boards also now allow a voter to go to their websites and print an absentee ballot application, but the voter must still mail or hand deliver the completed application to the board. There is no ability to submit that application electronically.

Senate Bill 191 would make another option available, and that is to allow voters to request, complete and submit an absentee application over the internet. I want to stress that under the bill this is completely OPTIONAL for the voter. They would still have the ability and right to use the same paper-based process that exists today.

A substitute version of the bill would require the Ohio Secretary of State to create a system allowing for this to happen. It would grab a signature from the state’s voter registration database, use that for the signature requirement and require other forms of identification as well. It leaves details of the design of the system to the Secretary of State’s office, but allows for a generous implementation phase of 18 months to make sure that we do this thoughtfully and correctly.

Now that you know the mechanics of how SB 191 will operate, I want to share with you our associations’ reasons for supporting the bill. First, and most obviously, SB 191 will create greater convenience for our voters. As I noted before, we live our lives online and our voters will surely appreciate having this option. Secondly, and selfishly, it will save boards of elections time and money. Paper requests are cumbersome and require staff time to process and enter into our systems. While staff will certainly be checking the validity of each online request in the same manner as we do for paper requests, the time saved in fielding phone calls or opening envelopes, stuffing envelopes, stamping envelopes, opening the returned envelopes and unfolding the paper requests will be substantial.

In conclusion, it is time for Ohio to allow technology to do its job. We have had online registration for several years now, and while not a perfect system, it is delivering promised efficiencies for election officials and voters. We believe that SB 191 is the logical next step and will deliver those same results. Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.