Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig -- thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 186. This bill will modernize Ohio's antiquated voter registration system and increase security, accuracy and convenience.

Once in place, this system will result in more accurate voter lists, reduce the risk of voter fraud, institute better citizenship checks, improve efficiency at county boards of elections, and do more to provide Ohio voters the confidence they deserve in their election system.

Such a change requires a better use of technology that, when considering Ohio's out-of-date registration system, is certainly necessary. It's important to remember that our voter rolls are highly dynamic as every day Ohioans create new registrations, abandon old ones and submit new information entirely. They may move out of state, register a second time at a new address, pass away or change their name as a result of a marriage or some other life event. However, the result is the same – thousands of abandoned registrations that clog up the voter rolls and leave them more vulnerable to voter fraud. Thankfully voter fraud is rare but it's our responsibility to keep it that way.

To preserve the integrity and efficiency of our elections, both state and federal law require Ohio to maintain accurate voter lists. The state and federal laws that require voter list maintenance were written decades ago and have withstood various legal challenges -- but they are not keeping up with the pace of technological change. Keeping an accurate registered voter list is a responsibility that has been carried out by Republican and Democratic Secretaries of State for decades. However, it's clearer than ever that Ohio is relying on an unsophisticated voter registration system that has become less of a tool for registering and updating voter information, and more of a political talking point. To be clear, in the year 2020 we should not have to wait for six years of inactivity before knowing that a particular registration is a duplicate or abandoned registration corresponding with a deceased or moved voter.

The status quo is antiquated and the time to replace it is now. Our outdated system reduces voter confidence, creates opportunities for fraud and makes government work far less efficiently. The process to keep accurate voter rolls relies on out-of-date mechanisms that allow for inactive registrations to remain on the books for years. Additionally, local boards of elections are forced to spend a significant amount of time attempting to manage this archaic system. There is a better way.

Just as retailers have long collected information from consumers at each point of sale, it's time for our registration system to work the same way.

This is how it will work: every day, Ohioans go to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to obtain or renew their Ohio driver license or state ID card. Instead of simply being handed a form which may or may not be filled out properly, if it's turned in at all, eligible Ohioans will have the opportunity to utilize technology to make sure they are properly registered. At the counter, after the interested party has completed the requirements for their license or ID card, the BMV attendant will show the individual a digital screen that has the potential voter's information pre-populated. At that point, the individual will make their decision to register to vote, update their voter registration, or do nothing at all. If the individual agrees to register to vote or update their voter registration, the registrant's county board of election will mail them a registration confirmation, at which point the registrant will be given an opportunity to reverse their decision if they so choose.

Utilizing the BMV provides value for this new system not just because of the sheer number of Ohioans they interact with on a daily basis, but also because of the time required between renewing a driver license or state ID. As you'll recall for voter list maintenance, registrants who do not have voter activity for six years are at risk of cancellation. However, a driver license or state ID must be renewed every four years. Therefore, as registrants obtain or renew their driver license every four years, they will automatically reset their clock for voter activity – thereby ensuring far greater accuracy of voter lists.

We didn't get here on our own. Republicans and Democrats have worked together to make this bill what it is today. We've also sat down at the table time and again with the Ohio Association of Election Officials to ensure their input is received and considered. Thanks in part to them, we've made several changes since the introduction of the bill that not only make it stronger, it makes the bill an absolute win for Ohioans.

I fully understand that there are some that would prefer to make big changes to the administration of our election system by making permanent changes to Ohio's constitution. While I certainly respect and appreciate their concern about the issue, I have serious reservations about enshrining election processes into the constitution. Why? For the very reason we're here today – the current election system has become archaic and time & technology have provided us a better way forward. By making these processes permanent fixtures in Ohio's constitution, years from now we may find ourselves stuck while other states trailblaze ahead using yet to be considered innovations.

Additionally, this new system is going to have another positive impact by making it far more likely that only U.S. citizens are registered to vote. Current procedures require an annual review of the voter rolls to determine the citizenship of Ohioans registered to vote. Unfortunately, this process is after the fact which could mean some non-citizens become registered to vote, perhaps even inadvertently. By checking for citizenship on the front end, before any vote can be cast, we'll be doing more to help non-citizens and helping ensure state and national laws are properly followed. This bill will help make sure non-citizens do not become registered voters in Ohio.

Finally, at a time when voter confidence in our election system is waning, SB 186 will do far more to strengthen it. According to data provided by the U.S. Census and Ohio's own voter registration database, over 90 percent of Ohioans are already registered to vote. And yet, more than 130,000 people were required to vote provisionally in the 2016 general election. This is almost certainly a result of avoidable errors in the voter registration list which this bill could easily remedy. The high number of Ohioans already registered is a strong indicator that SB 186 won't necessarily increase the number of registered voters. However, it will significantly improve voter roll accuracy which will decrease the number of voters required to cast their ballot provisionally. Voters must have confidence in the ability of their state and local governments to administer elections effectively and properly. SB 186 will go a long way to making sure that happens

I want to express my gratitude to Senators Sykes and Manning for their work on this very important issue. Thank you to the committee for allowing me to testify today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours in service,

Frank LaRose
Secretary of State