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TO: House Government Oversight Committee  
FROM: Greer Aeschbury, Ohio Campaign Manager, All Voting is Local Action  
DATE: 12/7/2022  
RE: Substitute House Bill 294 Ohio Election Security and Modernization Act

To Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, my name is Greer Aeschbury, Ohio Campaign Manager for All Voting is Local Action (AVL Action). Our organization fights for policies to ensure that every voice is heard. Expanding pathways to voter registration and accessing in-person and mail voting are critical to the health of our democracy. With that, I thank you for the opportunity to submit opponent testimony on substitute House Bill 294.

In the last hearing on this bill, my colleague Kayla Griffin testified about AVL Action's objections to several portions of this bill including removing the Monday before Election Day Early Voting, eliminating Automatic Voter Registration and prohibiting pre-paid postage for ballots and requests. I reiterate our strong opposition. Today, I want to focus on additional provisions:

#### Absentee access

1. In the bill's hearing on November 17th, Rep. Seitz described the reasoning for shortening return times for absentee ballots as a response to not wanting to wait the current 10 days for results. The most essential aspect of our elections is that every vote is counted. It is never worth sacrificing the accessibility of our democracy for slightly earlier results. We strongly urge the committee to maintain the absentee ballot return time of 10 days post election.

#### Disability Access

2. Another change in the sub bill that we want to highlight is the failure to provide access for Ohioans with disabilities. The original HB 294 specifies that Boards of Elections buildings must be accessible for people with disabilities. This provision is removed in the sub bill. Especially with record early voting numbers this year, we know more and more people will cast their ballot early at the Board of Elections. That means Boards of Elections and polling places must be accessible. The sub bill also eliminates provisions for curbside voting, which is critical for voters who may not be able to physically enter a polling place or the Board of Elections.



### Voter Confusion

3. Our organization with the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition manages the state's non-partisan Election Protection program. This is the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline that you see outside of polling places on election day. It serves as a non-partisan hotline to answer voter questions and assist them if they have trouble exercising their right to vote. Every year this line is flooded with questions about how to vote, how to register, how to request a ballot, where to return one and when. With the many changes in this bill including new deadlines and new voting times, this bill will undoubtedly exacerbate questions from voters and add confusion to an already complicated process. In addition to maintaining or expanding the current early voting schedule and deadlines, the legislature should make a commitment to expand voter education to combat confusion.

All Voting is Local Action is adamantly opposed to this bill. Instead of making it harder to vote, this body should create a safe, accessible and fair system with common-sense policies like automatic voter registration, multiple early voting sites and drop boxes, and multiple ways to confirm voter identity. My colleague asked "what is the problem you are trying to solve implementing this bill?" I reiterate this question today. If you wish to invest in a strong democracy, we urge you to reject this bill.