



Pro-Choice Ohio

Good morning, Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee. My name is Cole Wojdacz. I am the Field Manager for Pro-Choice Ohio, a statewide organization that advocates for abortion rights and reproductive freedom for all Ohioans. In this role, I oversee our statewide voter turnout program, a role which aligns with my lifelong love of voting. Since I can remember, I have always wished people a “Happy Election Day!” when going to vote as a kid with my parents or talking to voters outside of polling locations. I have a deep love for the fundamental rights granted to us as Americans, including a deep respect for our democracy. It is because of this that I am here to testify today on behalf of our staff, volunteers, and supporters across the state, in opposition to Substitute House Bill 294.

Without the basic right to vote and access to the ballot, no one is truly free, and our rights cannot be protected. The people who are most impacted by abortion bans and restrictions are the same people who are most impacted by these attacks on access to the ballot - Black, Brown, Latine, Indigenous, and other Ohioans of Color, young Ohioans, Ohioans with disabilities, Ohioans living in poverty, Ohioans living in rural areas, and LGBTQ+ Ohioans.

Substitute HB 294 is a dangerous, unnecessary attack on the right to vote. The substitute bill released last week makes an already bad bill worse. The removal of Automated Voter Registration, the canceling of early voting in person on the Monday before Election Day, limiting access to ballot drop boxes, arbitrarily shortening the absentee ballot request period, banning government officials from providing prepaid postage for absentee ballots all limit access to the ballot when we should be expanding access. We should be adding early voting locations, expanding early vote hours, and creating an Automatic Voter Registration system. These are the proposals this committee should be discussing today, not these attempts to further unravel our state’s democratic process. We can increase access and at the same time ensure our elections are fair and secure. If we cannot then our state leadership is even more unfit than they’ve already demonstrated.

I’ve been in and around campaigns and direct election work for multiple years – I canvassed my first household at 12 years old. I’ve seen the long lines at early vote locations, I’ve talked to countless people unsure about what kind of identification they must have to vote, even more people confused by shifting polling locations, or how and when they can return their absentee ballot. Our legislature should be looking at ways to reduce voter confusion and to increase access. Substitute HB 294 is the opposite of what Ohio needs.

Every Ohioan, no matter where they live, no matter how they vote, deserves equal access to the ballot - preserving equitable access to the ballot is a cornerstone of our democracy. Shoving this bill through, with major changes, in the final weeks of the legislative session is unnecessary. Do not limit the ability for the voices of the people to be heard. We urge a No vote.

I am happy to take any questions you may have at this time.