

**House Government Oversight Committee
Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 294
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Chairman Wilkin, Vice-Chairman White, and Ranking Member Sweeney, I appreciate the opportunity to present my testimony in opposition to SB 294, the Enact Ohio Election Security and Modernization Act.

My name is Karen Leith and I have resided in Hudson for the last 42 years. Having raised two children and currently helping with three grandchildren, civic responsibility has always been taught and valued in our family. Elections are discussed, and everyone eligible votes in an informed and responsible way. As my husband and I age and deal with health problems, we have had to avail ourselves of absentee ballots. Yet, even this is becoming harder under what you call necessary even though we have a tremendous record of secure and fair elections.

I am a resident of Summit County. Our mail delivery isn't the best, with lost pieces, delayed receipt, etc. Since the beginning of the pandemic, my husband and I have switched to absentee ballots. We send our applications in months in advance. We make use of the ability to track that application, and our absentee ballots arrive days apart. Therefore, I drive down to actually deposit our ballots at the Summit County Board of Election. That is truly an intimidating experience!!!!

In order to reach the drop box, I have to be in line to get into the Board of Election property with everyone else with any business there, especially in-person early voters. I then have to negotiate the people lines and parking lot to get to the far side of the second building, make a narrow turn down the sides of the building, drop off my ballot, and then continue around the narrow drive around the back of the building dodging trucks with deliveries, and again negotiate the parking lot to leave. Of course, the street itself is narrow.

By training, I am a social psychologist and have worked in advocacy and organizing for Catholic Charities in order to help people find their voice. Over the years, I have seen a growing discouragement as "the people's representatives" are moving to intimidate and discourage people from participating in civic engagement. This bill just heaps on more of this intimidation and discouragement.

Given my experiences, if you really want to make this a fair, secure process for ALL voters, you would:

1. Add grandchildren to those who can drop off absentee ballots.
2. Allow for drop boxes in more convenient locations – especially that are safe and secure for seniors – not intimidating,
3. Keep curbside voting,
4. Keep regular hours that are the same each day for in-person early voting,
5. Allow prepaid return postage for absentee ballot requests and absentee ballots,
6. Not shorten grace period for properly postmarked ballots.

In 42 years of residence in this state, I have gone from a spry 30's to a problematic 70's. Do not make it harder for us to vote. We have a wisdom we want to share, are very interested in keeping an Ohio that is attractive to the younger generations of our families.

I ask that you vote no on the current HB 294. Go back to the drawing board and make reforms that allow all our voices to be heard.