



HB 458 – Ending Unnecessary Special Elections, Proponent Testimony

Chairman Merrin, Vice-Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Sobbecki, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for House Bill 458.

In November of 2020, Ohioans set a record for voter turnout – 74 percent of all registered voters made their voice heard. That is good news for the civic health of our state.

But just a few months earlier that same year, in August of 2020, a special election occurred in Hamilton County where voter turnout was only 11.8%. On that same day, Cuyahoga County had their own special election. Their voter turnout? Just 6.8%. These are just two examples of chronically low turnout elections when voters aren't expecting an election to occur – and that is bad news for the civic health of our state. This important piece of legislation will fix it.

These embarrassingly low voter turnout rates aren't unique to these counties. Far more often than not, this is normal among counties that have an August special election. Voters just don't turn out.

That means just a handful of voters end up making big decisions. The side that wins is often the one that has a vested interest in the passage of the issue up for consideration.

This isn't how democracy is supposed to work. More importantly, it doesn't have to. Voters are just as capable of voting on these important issues during the standard primary and general elections and there is no reason why these contests can't happen at the regularly scheduled primary and general elections which occur twice a year.

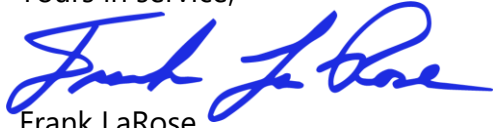
This is important not just for our communities, but for the success of our 88 county boards of elections. An August special election requires these boards to undergo a full election planning process, including recruiting and training poll workers, staffing early voting periods, and rigorous testing of equipment. These preparations are wasteful and cost the taxpayers precious scarce resources. What's worse, the boards often have little notice or time to prepare for such elections.

Simply put, an August Special election is the last thing election officials should be dealing with as they ready themselves for an important November election that begins with the start of early voting in October. These unnecessary "off-cycle" elections aren't good for taxpayers, election officials, or the civic health of our state. It's time for them to go!

Importantly, both the County Commissioners Association of Ohio and the Ohio Association of Election Officials are both supportive of this bill. These are bipartisan organizations that are serving as advocates for this legislation not just because it will make it easier to run successful elections, but because it is in the best interest of the voters.

I'd like to thank Representative Hall for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. Thank you again to the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 458.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State