

Testimony Before the Government Oversight Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives, April 26, 2023

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, good morning. My name is Tony Schroeder. I am a Member of the Putnam County Board of Elections. I was first appointed to the Board of Elections in March of 2016 and was reappointed last month to another four year term.

I am offering testimony today in support of House Bill 144 and Senate Bill 92.

If county Boards of Elections had a motto, it would be one borrowed from the Boy Scouts: “Be Prepared”. The administration of elections in Ohio changes constantly, as does the technology Boards of Elections employ to do their work. The statutes, judicial rulings, and directives of the Secretary of State that govern the actual conduct of elections change regularly as do the populations of electors that we serve. In fact, the only constant in elections administration is change.

Recently, county Boards of Elections have dealt with the “on, off, on again” Primary Election in 2020 and the uncertainty created by the redistricting process and judicial interventions that lead to an unusual August Primary election last year. In 2020, Boards throughout Ohio were faced with an unprecedented challenge - conducting a fair and accurate election in the midst of a pandemic. The emergency was such that not only was the date of the election changed, the means by which the election was conducted was also altered, setting aside the traditional casting of ballots at a polling place in favor of mail-in balloting.

In response to that emergency, the Putnam County Board of Elections, which meets monthly, met weekly (or more frequently) for most of 2020 to ensure that our voters would have every opportunity to cast their ballot in accordance with the laws, despite the COVID 19 pandemic.

In 2022, the requirement to change our Legislative and Congressional voting districts as a result of the decennial census led to a long period of “wait and see” for Boards of Elections, culminating in an order from the Federal courts to conduct the Primary Election in August, followed by the General Election in November. Despite the frequent changes in our election calendar, Ohio’s Boards of Elections adapted quickly to the situations they faced and conducted fair, thorough, and accurate elections across this State.

The year between Gubernatorial and Presidential election years is devoted to local elections, and many counties, like Putnam County, will not have a Primary election this year, because local candidates often do not declare a Party affiliation. As a result, a special election in August would not create a substantial burden to our Boards, and as the General Assembly is providing funding for the conduct of that election, our county budgets will not be impacted. In the case of my own Board of Elections, in Putnam County, that appropriation is likely to be entirely returned to the State; our county budget already provides funding for two elections in 2023, and we had no Primary Election this year, so we will not need additional funding to conduct an election in August. For many Ohio counties, the same situation will apply, and they will return most or all of the money appropriated by the General Assembly.

Ohio's method of election administration is robust and capable of adapting to change. Should the General Assembly decide to schedule an August Special election, Ohio's county Boards of Elections are prepared to conduct that election with the same dedication and professionalism that they have shown in prior, and more difficult, circumstances.