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Sponsor Testimony – H.B. 514  
Government Oversight Committee

May 14, 2024

Good morning Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and highly esteemed members of the Government Oversight Committee. Representative Thomas and I thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on H.B. 514 today.

The request we stand before you with today is quite a simple request, yet, without question, a needful and powerfully transformational one. Currently, under the Ohio Revised Code, jury commissioners are required to source from the voter registration list of their county board of election in the compilation of potential jurors to serve on either grand and/or petit juries. The language further espouses that, in addition, the commissioners may also include the certified current list of motor vehicles. This bill aims to change the verbiage from “may” to “shall” include all names from the current voter list and the certified registrar of motor vehicles.

Through the use of both certified listings in the annual jury sourced list, I am confident that we will be able to effectively broaden the jury pool to include more underrepresented communities, particularly Black and Brown communities, throughout our state. There is no question the aforementioned groups are grossly underrepresented in this respect. It further gets at what I believe the framers of the United States Constitution’s 6th Amendments intended in reference to a fair and impartial jury representative of one’s peers. It is customarily known that a jury of one’s peers today refers to the right to a trial by an impartial jury chosen from a cross-section of the community.

Narrowing and/or excluding people from the important work or serving on a jury because they did not register to vote is very limited thinking and short-sighted if we are indeed serious about justice. To ascribe a badge of greater responsible-ness to a person who registers to vote vs. one who is registered to drive in our state - who daily marshals about our streets operating a mass of metal weighing 100’s of pounds if not tons - is not rational, nor is it evidence in any form of truth. The fact is both require a significant measure of meaningful responsible-ness.

Having a driver’s license/state identification in Ohio affords an individual access to many amenities and solidifies rights that may otherwise be harder to come by. Allow me to highlight just a few. The privileges tied to a driver’s license include, work and recreation transport, check cashing, access to banking accounts when information is misplaced or lost, hospital testing, etc. The list is endless.

I humbly and unapologetically submit both are important, and both should be used in the serious and critically important decision-making relative to what group of citizens will be a part of the source list for potential jury service.

With recent voter purges, many in error – adversely affecting Black and other underrepresented communities, adding the BMV-certified registry would not only be timely – it is simply prudent, good public policy.

Therefore, let us further shore up its importance by requiring its inclusion in the annual sourcing. Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the committee, I respectfully submit that every citizen of Ohio, in our country for the matter, should enjoy the dignity of a fair and impartial jury and be judged by members of their peers. And when this commitment falls short, we must urgently explore improved avenues to ensure it does. Allow me to reiterate - without question, black, brown, marginalized, and poor people suffer alike when the aforementioned is not assured. Diversity is more than the color of one's skin and/or the zip code one resides. Yes, it is all of that, in addition to lived and learned experiences, culture, economics, education, and more. And even in the face of so many differences, there is one thing that must remain the same, and that is the certainty of a fair and impartial jury and a jury of one's peers no matter where you live, work, and/or play in the great state of Ohio.

Again, Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, we thank you for the honor of presenting sponsor testimony this morning.