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**Representative Jennifer Gross
The Ohio House of Representatives**

Representative Jennifer Gross - HB 546 Sponsor Testimony: June 25, 2024

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony for HB 546. This legislation will require Ohio ballots to have a watermark, visible under UV light, which identifies the ballot as an official Ohio ballot.

When combined with an appropriate chain of custody, watermarked ballots prevent illegitimate ballots from being injected into the flow and verify the validity of the ballot while protecting the privacy of the voter.

Watermarking has long been used as a security measure for important documents. In fact, contractors for the US Treasury rely heavily on this technology to identify bad bills. Our ballots are a form of currency in their own right. While the US Treasury is focused on ensuring we do not have fraudulent \$100 dollar bills circulating in our society, our ballots can be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. It is no secret that money and power are granted and revoked by the power of election outcomes.

With stakes this high, currency grade anti-fraud measures should be the minimal standards for our ballots. Many elections are decided by razor-thin margins. In the 2024 primary, a local Pickaway race was decided by one vote. In every race, voters have a right to know that only legitimate ballots were counted in their election.

The 2022 primary voters of Williams County could not have that confidence. Due to county-wide issues, ballots were not scanning correctly. The County was notified, and clerks were sent out to polling locations with blank ballot stock for touch writers. The county began to print new ballots in-house while coordinating with the Board Chair to secure Clear Office Solutions for faster ballot printing. Voters began to call with concerns. The county contacted Defiance County for more ballot stock. Meanwhile, voting location managers documented that ballots were being taken from their locations without them knowing how many were taken. At 11:30 am, the Election Day Event Log noted, "Began working on second round of new ballots." In the end, the voters could only know that an unknown number of ballots were counted and that a number was given as the results. There was no way for them to know how many of the ballots counted were legitimate ballots.

While we hope that the Williams County election is the anomaly, it demonstrates that extreme disorganization of ballots *do* - and even more importantly - *can* occur. The fact that something this overt has occurred should be a wake-up call to all of us that we have no idea how often

similar - or even lesser - instances are occurring, without documentation. The possibility of illegitimate ballots being injected into the ballot flow without any knowledge by the Board of Elections is real.

Watermarked ballots are a critical step to secure the integrity of elections. Watermarks ensure the authenticity of the ballots by protecting ballots from unauthorized copying, distribution, or modification. With a watermark, the authenticity of the ballot can be verified to ensure it has not been faked or altered. A watermark makes it clear that a ballot is protected, serving as a deterrent to those who may attempt to fake or alter a ballot. Additionally, watermarks aid in tracking a ballot. They make it easier to determine who is using the document and for what purpose.

Please join me in bolstering confidence in Ohio elections. Elections are an issue of national security, and we have a responsibility to uphold their integrity. Thank you once again for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 546. I would be glad to take any questions that the members of the committee may have.