



Senator Michele Reynolds - 3rd District
Senate Bill 147 Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the General Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 147, known as The Voter Modernization Act.

Senate Bill 147 modernizes voter registrations in Ohio. This voter-friendly bill allows voters to update their party affiliation in real time through a Voter Registration Form. Currently, a voter's party affiliation is implied not declared by a voter's primary ballot in even-numbered years. The current system, which determines party affiliation based on the last ballot a voter used, is antiquated and fails to offer a genuine reflection of a voter's political beliefs. This bill not only empowers voters to become more civically engaged, but allows voters the flexibility to join a political party of their choice at any time, eliminating the two-year waiting period.

The origins of this bill can be traced back to conversations with my constituents, particularly many new American citizens. They expressed concerns about their inability to join or change their party affiliation to reflect their values. This bill places a strong emphasis on voter autonomy and empowerment. While primary elections are traditionally partisan, the bill aims to reduce barriers to entry by enabling individuals to align with a party in real time.

The legislation modernizes Voter Registration in Three ways:

First, the bill introduces the concept of real-time voter registration. Empowering voters to declare or change their party affiliation whenever they wish, up to 30 days before a primary election. This can be done conveniently through a Voter Registration Form, either in person or online.

Second, this legislation requires candidates to be affiliated with a party to appear on that party's primary ballot. This provision ensures that voters are presented with candidates who align with the party they intend to support.

Third, Senate Bill 147 transitions Ohio's primary elections to a closed system. Under this system, a voter must be registered with a political party to vote using that party's ballot. I want to emphasize that this change does not affect issue voting for those who wish to remain unaffiliated.

The benefits to voters are numerous. The bill offers flexibility, allowing voters to declare or change their party affiliation at their convenience. It encourages informed voting, enabling voters to align their values with their chosen party or choose to remain unaffiliated. It provides ample time for consideration, ensuring voters can assess candidates and make informed choices. Additionally, it enhances data integrity by offering real-time, accurate voter data to the Ohio Secretary of State, modernizing our elections system and placing voters at the forefront. The issues that necessitate this bill are clear. Moreover, Senate Bill 147 addresses concerns about strategic party raiding, a practice where voters cross party lines to vote for weaker candidates, which undermines the trust in our election system and outcomes. In a national context, many other states have implemented similar party affiliation requirements and closed primary systems to safeguard election integrity and promote genuine political discourse.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 147 represents a significant stride toward modernizing voter registrations in Ohio. It prioritizes voters' needs and autonomy, increases data accuracy, and fortifies the integrity of the voter registration process in real-time. I wholeheartedly appreciate your time and consideration of this vital legislation.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.