

SENATE BILL 215 PROPONENT TESTIMONY

OHIO SENATE GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 27, 2024

Chairman Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Demora, and members of the Ohio Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 215.

As we embark on what will no doubt be another historic high-profile, high-turnout election year, immediate action is needed to correct a loophole in Ohio law that allows foreign nationals to finance and influence Ohio's elections.

In reviewing the campaign finance records associated with two statewide constitutional ballot issues in 2023, my office has compiled evidence showing foreign nationals contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to 501(c) entities, which then spent millions of dollars in Ohio to influence the outcomes of these proposed constitutional amendments. Ohio law clearly prohibits foreign nationals from donating directly or indirectly to political candidates; however, our laws do not address indirect foreign involvement in ballot campaigns. For example, in recent years, Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss has donated millions of dollars to the Wyss Foundation and the Berger Action Fund. These two organizations work in tandem, and the Berger Action Fund has bankrolled the Indivisible Project, the National Redistricting Action Fund, and the Sixteen Thirty Fund, all of which combined spent millions of dollars financing One Person One Vote and Ohioans for Reproductive Freedom PAC in the two most recent statewide ballot issue campaigns. Under current law, a single foreign national billionaire can fund Ohio issue campaigns by indirectly financing the operation of these American partisan interest groups. This runs contrary to the will of Ohio voters, who made clear in 2022 that our elections should be limited to the participation of our citizens.

Senate Bill 215 is strong legislation that will close this loophole and protect the integrity of Ohio's elections by prohibiting non-citizens from indirectly or directly donating to ballot issue campaigns. It also prohibits entities from accepting foreign donations. Funds that are illegally received must be returned to the foreign national. Senate Bill 215 requires all political entities to publicly attest, under penalty of election falsification, on disclosure forms filed with my office that they have not and will not accept campaign donations from a foreign source.

Our goal in the administration of Ohio's elections is simple: make it easy to vote and hard to cheat. This can only be achieved, however, if we continue to look for ways to improve the integrity of the process. By prohibiting foreign billionaires from attempting to manipulate our elections, Ohio will continue to serve as the gold standard of elections for the rest of the nation.

The November General Election is fast approaching and petitions for potential statewide ballot issues are being circulated as this committee meets. As Ohio's chief election officer, I urge you to move Senate Bill 215 quickly and pledge my full support to pursuing its passage by the House and enactment by the Governor. I applaud Senators McColley and Gavarone, along with this committee, for diligently working to improve the integrity of Ohio's elections.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State