

Testimony before the House Commerce and Labor Committee on House Bill 180

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, Ranking Member McNally, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am Tony Schroeder, a Board Member of the Putnam County Board of Elections, and I am here today to recommend the passage of House Bill 180.

Ohio's election process is the "gold standard" of elections administration and a model for the other States of the Union to follow. Under the direction of our superb Secretary of State Frank LaRose, our bipartisan Boards of Elections conduct our elections openly, fairly, accurately, and in a timely manner, delivering nearly complete results on each Election Night. Yet, the Secretary of State and our county Boards of Elections are only the top of the pyramid; the strong foundation of our system of elections is the hard work of our Voting Location Managers (VLMs) and Precinct Elections Officials (PEOs). These citizens give willingly of their time several days each year to train for and conduct elections in each of Ohio's more than 100,000 voting locations. They are the friends and neighbors who help us to exercise our most fundamental right: the right to cast a vote. Simply put, the State of Ohio cannot conduct an election without them.

But this vital resource, a pool of citizens willing and able to serve as poll workers, is finite. As our society changes, the number of Ohioans who can arrange their schedules to work at our polling locations grows smaller, and as many of our poll workers are older Ohioans, the very long days can be physically taxing.

Our Board of Elections Directors and Deputy Directors spend many days prior to each election recruiting and working to retain poll workers, and for many counties, finding enough people to serve is one of their greatest challenges. As such, this proposed legislation is both timely and needed.

Passage of this bill to ensure that poll workers will not face adverse employment action as a result of their public service will increase the number of potential poll workers immediately, and I would expect that number to grow as Ohioans learn about the change in the law. Similar protections exist for employed workers called to jury duty, and those protections help to make sure jury pools are sufficiently large to ensure proper justice - we should see a similar effect with our pool of poll workers.

The proposed amendment to this bill, to allow poll workers to work half-day shifts, is a common-sense measure that is sure to increase the number of available poll workers across Ohio. Each year, we see a number of our trained poll workers pass on the opportunity to serve because they have become physically unable to work a 14-hour shift at the polls; many of these poll workers would be glad to work a half-day shift if allowed to do so. Additionally, as flexible working arrangements have become the norm in many industries, we are likely to find a ready pool of employed persons who would be willing to serve a morning or afternoon shift as a poll worker.

I am particularly pleased to see the bipartisan nature of the sponsorship of this bill. County Boards of Elections strive to maintain bipartisanship in their polling locations by assigning poll workers from each party in equal numbers, but this has become increasingly difficult over the past

few election cycles, especially in rural Ohio. Protecting against adverse employment action and allowing for optional half-day shifts for poll workers will help to maintain that bipartisan balance.

Preserving Ohio's "gold standard" status for elections administration requires legislation to allow Boards of Elections and the Secretary of State to adapt to our changing society; this legislation does just that, and I recommend its passage.