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HB 197 Sponsor Testimony: House General Government Committee

Chair Ray, Vice-Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the House General Government Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 197, alongside my co-sponsor Representative Brown Piccolantonio. This bill moves Ohio's Presidential election year primary election date to the same date as the non-Presidential Election year primary date — the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May. Every fourth year, since the mid-1990s, we have scheduled our primary election in mid-March, allegedly for the purposes of Ohio being more of a player in the Presidential Primary races. Ohio's influence on that process has proven to be dubious at best, and it's time to return to a normal and consistent election schedule.

The benefits of approving the change are several:

1. Candidates for all federal, state, and county offices will not have to be filing petitions for nomination to be on the November ballot almost 11 months prior to that actual election in the preceding calendar year.
2. Voter confusion will be minimized with a consistent date every spring (and assuredly better weather on election day).
3. It will shorten the election season and potentially allow more time for governing and less for partisan politics.

Our proposal has already received support from the leaders of the Ohio Association of Election Officials. That Association's President, Terry Burton, Wood County Board Director, stated that "moving the primary to May in Presidential Election years just like every other year is common sense" and he hopes that a consistent primary in May will ensure "there are no ice storms in Northeast Ohio, our snowbirds are back to work the polls, and candidates are not trudging through snow to knock on doors."

This measure is bi-partisan and has 13 co-sponsors including Committee Member Synenberg. Previously, in the 133rd General Assembly, Representative Jack Cera introduced this legislation, and I introduced this legislation last General Assembly as well.

I've been around for a lot of presidential elections in Ohio and waiting until May isn't making Ohio irrelevant in presidential elections. Actually, the last time Ohio tipped a presidential primary race, I believe, was in 1976 when Jimmy Carter won Ohio's Democratic Presidential Primary, and it was held on June the 8th that year.

This is a primary election. Not just for people running for President, but also for those running for Congress, for the State House, and for every county office except one commissioner and the county auditor. Numerous issues also make it to the ballot at these elections, but decisions to beat the deadlines for their placement must be made in the calendar year prior to that March primary date, before the books on one calendar fiscal year have been closed, and before candidates elected to office at local elections a month earlier have even taken the oath for their term in office.

We are all keenly aware that many of our districts and counties substantially favor one political party over the other when all is said and done in the November general election. Primary elections have in so many cases been the real determinant in who ends up serving. Many of our colleagues elected in 2022 and now serving their second term are here because they were victorious in an August election for their party's nomination, but we also know that it was an election that did not see anything near robust voter turnout, because of its unusually scheduled date. Going forward, if nominations secured in a party primary are in so many cases the decisive election, we should be doing our utmost to discourage confusion and encourage greater participation by a common and consistent date every election year.

I believe it is imperative and important that we schedule elections for the ease and the convenience of the citizens and folks that have to administer them. We've recently gone through some unusual election years with hastily determined election days that not only confused voters, but also discouraged participation. The citizens, the "We the People," should be our main concern in scheduling and conducting elections, not the national political parties and the cadre of national political nominating convention delegate wannabe's.

Chair Ray, and Committee members, I don't see any downside to codifying our primary election date to the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May, and I hope you agree that there are indeed positive benefits derived in doing so. I would be pleased to attempt to answer any questions that are posed today. Thank you for your attention and consideration.