

**Ohio's 54<sup>th</sup> House District**

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**State Representative Kellie Deeter**

**54<sup>th</sup> House District**

Chair Ray, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 299.

House Bill 299 is an important bill that would safeguard our state ballots from individuals and organizations that reside outside of our state. HB 299 lays out a clear process for certification that would be required to circulate state petitions.

This bill was prompted by growing concerns among voters, election officials, and legislators that outside parties are influencing our elections while having no stake nor responsibility to adhere to the measures that our state passes. While petition circulation is a vital tool for civic engagement, the process should be secure for the citizens signing a petition and for the boards of elections.

House Bill 299 primarily makes one significant and necessary change to Ohio's election law. There would be multiple important benefits from requiring circulators to be licensed by the Secretary of State:

-First, the requirement for Ohio residency helps ensure that those collecting signatures have a stake in Ohio's policies and governance and are subject to the jurisdiction of Ohio's laws. S

-Second, House Bill 299 would strengthen our accountability and would increase the Secretary of State's enforcement power. This bill gives the boards of elections and the Secretary of State clearer authority to investigate and challenge improper petition practices, especially in cases where circulators are found to not be an Ohio citizen.

This legislation is not about making it harder to circulate petitions and gather signatures, instead it is about ensuring that the process is transparent, responsible, and credible. It respects the constitutional rights of Ohioans to propose changes to the law, while also ensuring that these efforts are conducted with integrity.

HB 299 is a commonsense response that will further protect Ohio from out-of-state influences, and it would amplify the voices of our Ohio citizens.

We respectfully ask for your support of House Bill 299 and would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you for your attention to this important issue and for your work in preserving the voice of Ohio's citizens.