TESTIMONY OF ANDREA R. YAGODA OPPOSING SB4

Chair Ray, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking member Brent and Members of the House General Government Committee. My name is Andrea R. Yagoda. I have been a resident of Ohio for fifty one (51) years. I stand before you today to oppose SB 4.

In her sponsor testimony Senator Gavarone stated that she has submitted this bill for fear that the Integrity Unit could be eliminated in the future by a subsequent Secretary of State. I have a fear too and it is, in my opinion, a more realistic fear since voter fraud in this state is minimal at best. My fear is that the investigation of voter fraud will be used as a weapon against those of the opposing party. We are witnessing this right now in real time at the federal level not only with the Department of Justice but the appropriation of funds, redistricting and voter laws.

In 2024 this legislative body gave the Ohio Attorney General the absolute power to investigate the use of foreign money in campaigns. No guidelines, no time limits, in fact, no limits whatsoever and this power would include the freezing of funds pending an investigation. This bill can have the same effect. It could duplicate investigative efforts and prolong the possible prosecution of voter fraud allegations.

This bill grants the power of the integrity unit to submit for investigation, at their sole discretion, any complaint of voter fraud which the county prosecutor has not prosecuted within a year of the referral. Who appoints the members of the Voter Integrity Unit? The partisan Secretary of State. The same present Secretary of State that publically takes stands on issues and candidates to be decided by the voters in elections he oversees. No real guidelines, a no real oversight. Once referred to the Attorney General there are no timelines for his/her office to decide on whether to pursue the allegations. And the Attorney General is granted the authority to reverse the decision of the county prosecutor not to prosecute after an investigation, review and determination that there is no voter fraud. Anyone whom the county finds is not guilty of voter fraud

and chooses not to prosecute will be left in limbo wondering if the Integrity Unit will refer the matter for investigation. And this limbo is for an indefinite period of time.

Many Boards of Elections work closely with their local County Prosecutor's offices. In Delaware County, two (2) attorneys from our prosecutor's offices attend all BOE meetings. They converse, advise and discuss any problems and possible voter fraud issues. The prosecutor's office keeps the Board apprised of all developments in those cases. Board meetings are open to the public and some BOEs even post their meetings via zoom or youtube so they are accessible to the public and there is transparency which will not be the case for allegations re referred to the AG's officeunder this bill. County prosecutors are in the best position to investigate with the assistance of local law enforcement and determine the merits of the case. This Bill undermines the office and role of the county prosecutor, an official elected by the residents in his/her community. Most of us, myself included, believe that our county prosecutors are less political than the Secretary of state and the Ohio Attorney Genera and as such have greater trust in them. I. To declare an arbitrary one (1) year limitation has no rationale and none has been provided. And yet no time limit has been provided for the AG to complete its investigation, so clearly time is not of the essence. Why are voter fraud cases more important than other felonies so that they must be afforded priority with a one (1) year mandate especially when voter fraud is minimal?

What is the purpose of the bill? Is it to appease the election denying base to be used in a campaign for a statewide office? What problem does it solve? Is it merely another solution looking for a problem? Bills like these serve to create doubt about the integrity of our elections. No one supports voter fraud but it is minimal at best and this bill does nothing to address this very small problem. Many alleged voter fraud complaints tend to be mistakes made by a voter. Even county prosecutors are against this bill as evidenced by testimony submitted when this bill came before the Senate.

Perhaps rather than concentrating on bills that have no real rationale or purpose, why not concentrate on ways to educate the public on voter laws and work to increase voter participation?

I would ask that this committee vote NO on this bill.

Andrea R. Yagoda