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Senator Theresa Gavarone

Senate Majority Floor Leader
2nd District

Chair Roegner, and fellow Members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for affording me the time to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 82, bipartisan legislation which will protect our crucially important election officials at a time when political polarization puts them at increased risk of harm.

Today more than ever, our election officials deserve increased protection. Recently, election workers in Washington State, Oregon, Nevada, California and Georgia received letters laced with fentanyl and a call to "end elections now".¹ Further, more than a dozen people nationwide have been charged with threatening election workers, including threats of lynching and mass shootings at polling locations.² Closer to home, a BOE member from my district explained that during the 2022 midterm's one of their polling locations received threat of a mass shooting. Just this year, this same election official said someone threatened to "whip my ass" and another threatened to come to his home.

Ohio's election workers should not have to worry about this. The work our election officials do is thankless, yet it is essential to a functioning democracy. Senate Bill 82 is a simple definition change, it designates election officials as public service workers which will exempt election officials from having to disclose their residential or familial information as public records. This exemption from public record requirements is the same exemption that police officers and prosecutors have. Due to the increased risk of harm for election officials, there is no reason for their address to be part of the public record – the risks outweigh any benefit.

This is not a red or blue issue, this is a public safety issue. The increased political polarization of our country has put our election officials in danger, and this legislation will give those people the peace of mind they deserve.

Chair Roegner, thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony for Senate Bill 82.

We are happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have at this time.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/22/us/fentanyl-letters-election-workers-threats.html>

² <https://apnews.com/article/election-workers-threats-justice-department-trump-f17df44d63156a28eaa0862b0aa08f0b>