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Sponsor Testimony Senate Bill 260: Voter Registration Modernization Act

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and members of the General Government Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 260, The Voter Registration Modernization Act.

Under current Ohio law, voters may only declare or change their political party affiliation by requesting a party ballot during a primary. This process is limiting and outdated. Ohioans deserve a system that empowers them to make choices about each individual candidate and not about political parties in real time. Senate Bill 260 addresses this issue by allowing a voter to indicate or change their party affiliation when registering to vote or when updating their voter registration, rather than restricting that opportunity to primary elections. Importantly, the bill also preserves existing provisions that permit a voter to declare or change party affiliation on the day of a primary by requesting a party's ballot, as current law allows.

For voters already registered in Ohio prior to the bill's effective date, their party affiliation will remain unchanged and will continue to be based on their most recent primary voting history. They will retain that affiliation unless and until they choose to change it.

To promote transparency and ensure voters are well informed, the bill requires that all voter registration acknowledgment notices include the elector's current party affiliation, if any. This information will continue to be publicly accessible through the Statewide Voter Registration Database. Additionally, Senate Bill 260 adds information about party affiliation to the Secretary of State's official voter registration brochure, as well as to the materials used in public school programs that involve voter registration activities. These additions will help ensure that both current and future voters understand their rights.

The bill also makes important updates regarding the formation and support of new political parties in Ohio. It maintains the ability of any voter to sign a party formation petition, as under current law. However, it clarifies that candidates of a newly formed party who are nominated by petition must be registered as affiliated with that party. Moreover, in order to sign a nominating petition for such candidates, voters must either be registered with the new party or be

unaffiliated with any party. These changes help ensure consistency and integrity in the party formation process while continuing to allow new political movements to emerge and participate in Ohio's electoral system.

Senate Bill 260 is a commonsense, nonpartisan measure that strengthens voter rights, modernizes our election laws, and ensures greater clarity and flexibility in how Ohioans choose their political affiliations. It does not close primaries. SB 260 respects the roles of voters, parties, and election officials alike, while modernizing registration.

Thank you again for your attention. I welcome any questions you may have.