



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF OHIO

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LWVO Interested Party Testimony on
HB 64 – State Budget
Senate Finance Committee
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Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present interested party testimony on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO).

LWVO believes it is imperative to appropriate necessary funds to ensure a smooth election in 2016, and we wish to thank the Senate for including funding in Sub. H.B. 64 for mailing absentee ballot applications and to assist counties with purchasing electronic poll books

The League supports three measures that would aid election officials in the administration of high-turnout elections: retaining the appropriation for the mailing of absentee ballot applications, providing electronic pollbooks for all county Boards of Elections, and online voter registration.

Absentee Application Mailing

We fully support the appropriation made by the House at the request of the Secretary of State and voting advocates to continue sending absentee ballot applications to all registered voters. While Senate President Faber publicly voiced support for the appropriation, we want to thank this committee for retaining it in the latest version of budget.

The absentee mailing is critical to smooth election administration, because voting patterns in Ohio have changed since the advent of no fault absentee voting in 2006. Currently, upwards of one third or more Ohio voters choose to cast their ballot before Election Day. Not going to the polls on Election Day has become an increasingly popular option in rural and urban counties alike. With these changing voting patterns, voters are accustomed to receiving their absentee applications in the mail.

Here is a little history. In recent years various county Boards of Elections (BOEs) have increasingly relied on absentee voting as an effective election administration tool to avoid unnecessary delays and excessively long Election Day lines. This is a much more efficient approach as opposed to the more expensive options of more voting machines or the cost of additional precincts. In fact, many Ohio BOEs have taken advantage of this trend to consolidate precincts. Since 2008, Ohio has roughly 2000 fewer precincts with an annual cost savings of nearly \$4.4 million, without counting the costs of the voting machines for those precincts.

The county BOEs achieved these cost savings by reminding registered voters to take advantage of early voting options through mailing absentee voter application requests forms to all registered voters. With the passage of SB 205 last session, local BOEs were prohibited from sending out absentee ballot application mailings, and no government official other than the Secretary of State can send these applications to all voters. SB 205 further specified that the Secretary could continue sending absentee applications statewide only if the money is appropriated by the legislature.

We submit that if the money is not appropriated for this mailing, the recently established voting patterns in Ohio will likely be disrupted causing confusion, delays, and unacceptably long lines at the polls -- as well as increased costs and staffing problems for the many county BOEs that have consolidated. The Secretary of State's Office said that this mailing "not only ensures that all eligible voters can conveniently vote without ever leaving home, but it helps ensure a smoother Election Day." Isn't this what we all want for Ohio?

Thank you for retaining the \$1.25 million appropriation for the 2016 absentee ballot application mailing to Ohio's registered voters, and we strongly urge the Senate to make sure it is included in the final version of the budget.

Electronic Pollbooks

LWVO also appreciates the Senate's willingness to make good on a second promise to Ohio voters. Last session, the legislature passed SB 109 that created a process for certifying electronic pollbooks, but stopped short of providing needed funds for purchasing them.

E-pollbooks have numerous benefits, including making it easier to maintain updated and accurate records of voters who cast early ballots, providing poll workers a complete database so they can look up all voters and addresses, faster and more accurate voter check-in at the polls, and significant cost savings over printed lists.

Many counties would like to purchase electronic pollbooks but do not have the funds to do so without assistance. The estimate from the election officials is that it would cost \$15 million to purchase e-pollbooks for all 88 counties. A compromise was reached to appropriate approximately \$13.5 million in state funds and then the counties would have to put up a 10% match to reach the \$15 million. This is a reasonable compromise to provide counties with the financial assistance to modernize pollbooks. We appreciate the Senate's action to provide the funds necessary to purchase electronic pollbooks statewide, so that every county has uniform access to this equipment.

Online Voter Registration

Last but certainly not least, we urge the legislature not to continue delaying approval of online voter registration. It is a bi-partisan concept whose time has come. It is more secure, convenient and accurate than traditional paper forms, and it will save taxpayer money.

LWVO believes that these three important measures will have a lasting positive impact on election administration in Ohio, and we urge you to ensure they are included in the final Senate version of HB64.