



Senator Theresa Gavarone

2nd Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 191

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

September 25, 2019

Chairman Coley, Ranking Member Craig and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify for Senate Bill 191, legislation to allow Ohioans to request an absentee ballot online. I have worked closely with the bipartisan Ohio Association of Election Officials to develop this bill and believe it represents a real and important step forward in election administration for the state. The explicit goals of SB 191 are to make access to our election system easier for voters and more efficient for election administrators.

It is hard to believe that in 2019, a process as integral to our elections system as requesting an absentee ballot would be REQUIRED to be a manual, paper-based process. However, as I have worked more closely on election-related issues, it is becoming apparent that many aspects of our election code need to be updated to reflect technology and the numerous other changes that we have made over the years. One of those significant changes is the increased popularity of absentee balloting.

Currently, requesting an absentee ballot is a highly cumbersome process for voters and election administrators alike. If a voter wishes to request an absentee ballot, the options are to call the board of elections and request an application (which the board would mail to them), go on-line and print off a form (which must then be mailed to the board of elections) or show up at the board of elections and request and fill out the application in-person. All of these options require more time and energy, and a reliance on our postage system, than is warranted in the 21st Century.

In 2016, Ohio passed landmark legislation allowing voters to register to vote online. Yesterday was National Voter Registration Day, and on that day alone thousands accessed that system to take the critical first step in exercising their right to vote. If Ohio can figure out a secure and reliable way for on-line registration, then extending that service to absentee ballot requests is a no-brainer.

I want to emphasize a couple key points about SB 191. First, it requires the same information to be provided by the voter on the online application as is already required for paper-based applications. Second, numerous safeguards exist to ensure the ballot that is ultimately received by the board of elections was cast by the person who requested it. That is why we specifically request personal identifying information in the same manner that we do for paper requests. Finally, SB 191 only extends an additional option and convenience to voters. It does not replace or supersede a voters' ability to submit a paper absentee ballot application should they wish to do so.

In conclusion, SB 191 is a logical extension of our legislation to allow online voter registration. It furthers this body's considerable efforts to modernize and streamline the voting process and increases ballot access. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions the committee might have.