



**Ohio Environmental Council**  
[Action Fund]

**Proponent Testimony of Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund**  
**Senate Bill 191 - Absentee Ballots**  
**Presented to the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee**  
**December 2, 2020**

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present **proponent** testimony of Senate Bill 191 (“SB 191”). My name is Trent Dougherty, General Counsel for the Ohio Environmental Council (“OEC”) Action Fund.

Despite a global pandemic and voter concerns over safety, a record number of Ohioans cast their vote this November - with a record number doing so before election day. Given the unprecedented use of absentee voting during the 2020 election, Ohio must modernize its absentee voting system. Over three million Ohioans utilized absentee voting during the 2020 General Election, but many others felt frustrated by the cumbersome application process. If such frustration kept even one Ohioan from voting, then it is an issue we must fix today. SB 191 is a great step to ensure every registered voter in Ohio has an easy opportunity to request an absentee ballot. An electronic request system for absentee ballots simply makes sense, with or without concern over a pandemic.

The OEC Action Fund believes there are also great opportunities to build upon SB 191, improving our absentee voting processes and our overall election system. When a voter casts a ballot at a polling place, they bear no cost. They just need to walk from their house to the booth. Similarly, every absentee voter should bear no cost. The legislature should authorize the Secretary of State to pay for the postage of every absentee ballot, ensuring no barriers exist between registered voters and casting their vote.

Likewise, the legislature should explore future opportunities to modernize everything, from automatic voter registration and election day registration systems to multiple early voting centers and absentee ballot drop boxes per county. The legislature could also consider authorizing the Secretary of State to have the authority to send an absentee ballot to all registered Ohio voters, a voting method that would have been maximally protective of public health during a health crisis like the one we’re currently experiencing.

Senate Bill 191 is needed not only to strengthen our absentee voting system, but should be passed this lame duck session as a message for the next General Assembly that we can and must work together to make voting easier for every eligible Ohioan. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony, and the OEC Action Fund looks forward to future opportunities to work with the Ohio General Assembly to improve and modernize our elections.