

**Proponent Testimony in Support of SB 191
Ohio Senate | Committee on Government Oversight & Reform
Columbus, OH | December 2, 2020**

Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide government advocacy, public affairs, and community relations voice of our eight Jewish federations and their 150 community, cultural, social, and human services agencies on the front lines helping Ohioans of every faith – and of none – every day. We submit this testimony on their behalf as well.

Background and Statement of Interest

Stemming from both our values and our history, Jewish communities view the responsibility to vote, and to petition and participate in government, as sacred. As a minority faith that was often denied the right to vote in the past, we are committed to protecting that right for ourselves and others. (Even in the United States, many states had religious tests for the franchise and/or for public office. In Europe Jews were denied the right to vote for centuries; Romania was the last European country to afford that right to Jews in 1923. Conversely, Jews know too well that disenfranchisement is one of the first moves of tyrants.) We also feel this obligation from a sense of gratitude towards a country and a system of government that has been benevolent.

For instance, Rabbi Moses Feinstein wrote in 1984 that a fundamental principle of Judaism is

“recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system which safeguards the freedoms we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibility incumbent on each individual is to register and to vote.”

Even though as of 1787, the US Constitution forbid religious tests to hold “any Office or public Trust,” Maryland, as one example, still prevented Jewish citizens from holding office by requiring a religious test until 1825.¹

These experiences inform Ohio Jewish Communities on the importance of every individual vote, and our responsibility to protect this democratic freedom for all Ohioans in this unprecedented pandemic.

For these reasons, as the Government Oversight and Reform Committee considers SB 191, OJC expresses its support. We are grateful to Senator Gavarone for her leadership on this important, and always timely, issue.

OJC Supports SB 191 in Principle but also as a Cost-Efficient Means of Securing Elections

Many things are essential to maintaining free and fair elections in Ohio. And, we can be proud that Ohio led the nation in a year that began with the Iowa caucus snafu and ended with a messy vote count and certification in several bellwether states.

¹ <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc4800/sc4872/003183/html/m3183-1670.html>

Ohio's bipartisan tradition of election administration and its early voting and no-fault absentee requests are key parts of that system. SB 191 strengthens that by allowing for online absentee voter requests coupled with stringent security requirements that Secretary of State LaRose has already shown his office can administer.²

SB 191 will also more fully bring Ohio's election infrastructure into the 21st Century and help streamline the time and cost of administering elections and creating an electronic paper trail that will join with the paper absentee ballot for a secure voting option.

We understand the need for maintaining election integrity, and we support the basic identity matching requirements in SB 191 to combat voter fraud. Many other states have some form of online or web-based absentee ballot application process.³ Other states processes to apply for absentee ballots range from web-based portals to email options, with several options that can easily streamline the application process for both Ohio's voters and our county board of elections while keeping costs down. This technology also is an opportunity to increase electoral efficiency related to absentee ballots.

Conclusion

Our government's authority is derived "from the consent of the governed."⁴ Indeed, the late Congressman John Lewis said voting "is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have."

In the polarized political times we live in, let's commit to enhancing civil opportunities for civic engagement.

We ask that SB 191 be reported to the Senate quickly for full consideration.

We are happy to answer questions, and we look forward to working with you on this.

Howie Beigelman
Executive Director

###

² <https://www.vox.com/2020/11/13/21563825/2020-elections-most-secure-dhs-cisa-krebs>

³ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-6-states-with-web-based-and-online-absentee-ballot-applications.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>