



**Proponent Testimony on HB55 – Allow Virtual Committee Meetings
House Government Oversight Committee
Nazek Hapasha, MPA
March 25, 2021**

Chairman Wilkin, Vice-Chairman White, and Ranking Member Sweeney:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Nazek Hapasha, program associate at the League of Women Voters of Ohio. The League believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government, and has long worked for broad public participation in government as a necessary component of decision-making at all levels of government. **Accordingly, the League of Women Voters of Ohio strongly supports House Bill 55.** Furthermore, the benefits of this bill far outweigh addressing the challenges of this pandemic, and would dramatically improve access to Ohio's democracy. As such, **we urge the committee to consider an amendment that would allow virtual testimony to be accepted as standard practice in every legislative committee after the threat of the pandemic has passed.**

The coronavirus pandemic presented new challenges to the democratic policy making process, but has also highlighted the benefits and possibilities of technology and innovation in every aspect of our life and every sector of work. Video-conferencing technology would allow a diverse array of Ohioans from every corner of this state to be more involved in their government. These are citizens that lawmakers need to hear from – surgeons who cannot cancel procedures scheduled months in advance; the disabled and/or elderly who cannot drive or navigate reaching a hearing room at the Statehouse in a busy city they are unfamiliar with; a low-income worker who cannot afford to forego a day's earnings or jeopardize their job. Indeed, the highly experienced and knowledgeable issue specialists of our own LWV Ohio Lobby Corps have often been unable to come to Columbus before the pandemic to present the testimony they wrote for such reasons.

The technological means to allow virtual testimony do exist, and the measure has been implemented in municipalities and states all over the country. In fact, Ohio is just one of 8 states that still does not allow people to testify remotely by phone or video during committee hearings.¹ Virtual testimony and hearings have also been widely utilized by courts during the pandemic, and will continue to be utilized when the threat of COVID is behind us.²

¹ [Pandemic redefines 'public' access to government meetings \(apnews.com\)](#). March 14, 2021.

² [Principles for Continued Use of Remote Court Proceedings | Brennan Center for Justice](#). September 10, 2020

While written testimony allows a person's opinion to be on the record, it simply misses the mark in conveying the meaning and depth of their words, and of course does not allow the respected members of the committee to ask follow-up questions.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this critically important bill to Ohio's democracy. It would be amiss to not benefit from the lessons presented by a once in a lifetime global crisis. The day and age has come where marginalized voices CAN be heard in the policy-making process if allowances were made, and so they MUST.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has over 4000 members and 32 local Leagues across the Buckeye State.