

Interested Party Testimony
HB 294
Ohio Association of Election Officials

Chairman Wilkin, Ranking Member Brown and members of the House Government Oversight Committee:

My name is Terry Burton and I am Legislative co-chair of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAE0). OAE0 is a bipartisan organization that represents Ohio's 88 county boards of elections and their staff. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on the latest version of HB 294 and thank Representative Seitz, Representative Ray, and all the members from both political parties that have worked hard on this legislation.

I would like to share with the committee the various aspects of HB 294 that enjoy broad bipartisan support from OAE0 as well as ideas we have for improving the legislation.

Items that have been discussed by OAE0 and are supported as improvements to election law include:

- Codifying the requirement that voting machines be tested before being used in an election.
- Codifying the requirement that boards of elections prepare Election Administration Plans, which serve as a "business plan" for board operations.
- Eliminating voting on the Monday preceding the election and reallocating the Monday hours so there is no reduction in early voting hours.
- Funding to replace and upgrade electronic pollbooks, technology that has greatly enhanced the voting experience for voters and election administrators alike.

- The creation of an online absentee ballot portal.
- Moving the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot to 7 days prior to the election. This is a move that will enfranchise thousands of Ohioans who request an absentee ballots so close to Election Day that the post office is unable to deliver them timely enough for the voters to cast them.
- Codifying the use of drop boxes and allowing them to be used during the entire early voting period. While OAEO has always preferred allowing local boards to choose how many drop boxes to deploy, current law is silent on drop boxes. This means that any Secretary of State could eliminate their use at any time through directive so writing them into law is a positive step.
- The addition of a bill that eliminates August special elections.
- The addition of provisions to improve Ohio's ballot printing statutes.

We would ask the committee to consider the following amendments:

- Align the online absentee request deadline, currently 10 days in the bill, to seven days to coincide with the absentee request deadline for other absentee voters. Clarify the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot to mirror the end of early in-person voting hours on the Tuesday before the election. Allow ballots to be postmarked Election Day as opposed to the day before the election as is the current law.
- Consider creating as much consistency in early absentee voting hours as possible. OAEO has had numerous conversations for many years about this topic and while our members have not arrived at a consensus on standard hours, we would offer these thoughts. 1) Weekday hours should begin at 8:00am and end on the hour rather than on the half hour, 2) Sunday voting should begin earlier to accommodate voters who are leaving religious

services and want to vote after that, and 3) the total number of hours should closely mirror the current schedule or expand them the last week of voting when things tend to intensify.

- Clarify that absentee ballots that are returned inside an envelope but outside the ID envelope can be counted, so long as all the identifying information matches the voters' information in the database.
- Remove the provision that requires that drop box surveillance tape be released immediately and clarify that it is a public record subject to the same requirements of all other public record requests submitted to boards of elections.
- Clarify that boards of elections may continue to vote individuals who are hospitalized by sending a bipartisan team to the hospital, even after the close of the absentee voting request period up until 3:00pm on Election Day.
- Restore provisions creating a way for voters to automatically update their registration information at the BMV or initiate a new registration.
- Restore the ability to the Secretary of State to mail absentee ballot requests to registered voters if the General Assembly appropriates dollars for such purposes.

Mr. Chairman, we want to thank the committee for allowing us to submit our comments and I would be happy to answer any questions the members might have.