



Chairwoman Gavarone, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Local Government and Elections Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 14.

The 2020 election was the most secure, accessible, and successful election in state history – and it resulted in the highest voter turnout we've ever experienced. Despite the unprecedented challenge of running an election in the midst of a once-in-a-century global pandemic, hundreds of bipartisan election officials from across Ohio got the job done along with tens of thousands of Election Day poll workers. The mission I set out for our team more than a year ago was that on election night, Ohioans would **know** and **believe** the results of our state's 2020 presidential election. That mission was accomplished. Ohio is clearly a national leader in fair, honest and accessible elections. But that doesn't mean we rest on our laurels. The reason we've become a national model for election administration is that we are always working to evolve and prepare for the next election and the challenges that come with it. That's why I'm here today.

Since we are a "bottom-up" state, Ohio's eighty-eight county boards of elections are responsible for maintaining voter rolls and ensuring the security and accuracy of their data. To support this effort, they contract with one of several vendors who offer voter registration database products and assist them in their use – all without any oversight whatsoever. This has led to concerns about accuracy and security. Our voter registration system is in desperate need of a security upgrade at the county level and the time to act is now.

Thankfully, there are clear and simple steps that we can take to protect Ohio.

The Board of Voting Machine Examiners (BVME) is a bipartisan board made up of four members: two individuals appointed by the Secretary of State and one appointee from each chamber of the General Assembly, appointed by the leader of the opposite party of the Secretary to ensure partisan balance. Currently, they are charged with certifying Ohio's voting machines, e-poll books, and ballot marking devices. Upon the passage of SB 14 this body would be renamed the Board of Voting *System* Examiners to better reflect its expanded mission.

Senate Bill 14 will place voter registration systems within the purview of the BVSE and, with the help of a newly appointed cyber security expert, allow for the creation of standards each vendor must meet before their products can be purchased by the county

boards of election. Our boards are comprised of hard-working men and women, but they're not cyber security experts. When a vendor states their product is secure, the boards have no way to verify whether that is true, nor are any requirements in place. This bill will provide counties with much-needed help in ensuring the services vendors provide are secure, accurate and reliable.

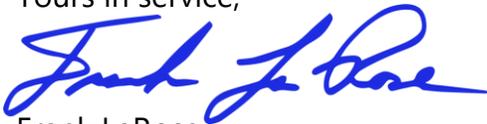
Since day one, we have made the security of our election systems a priority, utilizing both directives and priority legislation. In fact, Ohio's Election Security & Accessibility Directive, which I issued, has been used by other states as the benchmark for security. A summary of that security directive has been provided to members of the committee. It includes important requirements such as network intrusion detection and response protocols, least privilege permissions to ensure that only those who need to access sensitive systems and information can do so, and network security and segmentation requirements to isolate and contain a potential intrusion.

Ohio has been at the forefront of election security for years. From requiring 100% paper ballots either voter-marked or voter-verified, to ensuring our voting machines are never connected to the Internet and mandating post-election audits, we have set an example for other states to follow. Now is the time to act to secure a critical and potentially vulnerable part of our elections.

Last year, this legislation was introduced by Senator Rulli and passed with 45 cosponsors and bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. Unfortunately, the bill did not make it to the governor's desk at the end of lame duck because of an unrelated amendment that had been added at the last minute. I urge swift action to get this legislation done quickly in the new General Assembly.

Thank you, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State