Chairman Blessing, Ranking Member Clyde and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee:

I am Tim Ward and although I currently serve as President of the Ohio Association of Election Officials, I am here today testifying as Director of the Madison County Board of Elections, and not on behalf of my association. I wish to express my support for HB 41 and explain the reasons why I feel that this bill is so important.

The basis for HB 41 was conceived over three years ago by a bipartisan team of election officials from Hamilton County. As a county that uses optical scan voting equipment, they noticed that the process they used for voting in-person absentee voters was both cumbersome and expensive. Initially they wanted to explore the possibility of simply getting rid of in-person absentee voting and moving to true “early voting.” However, it was quickly realized that doing so would require a change to the Ohio Constitution to allow this to happen. So instead of taking this approach, we began to analyze the processes and procedures we use to vote in-person absentee voters and see how they could be streamlined. The result is what you have before you today in HB 41. The legislation has been carefully crafted to create a win-win-win for Ohio voters, taxpayers and election administrators.

**A win for voters:**

* As drafted the bill will allow voters to check in to vote in an expedited fashion by reducing unnecessary and burdensome paperwork. No longer will the voter be forced to fill out an absentee application or an absentee identification envelope. The vast majority of in-person absentee voters show up with ID in hand and are upset that they have to fill out this lengthy paperwork. A great bi-product of this change will be to shorten lines at our early voting locations as we can now process these voters much more expeditiously. As we all know, lines are much less of an issue on Election Day thanks to our generous absentee voting system. However, lines remain an issue at our early voting locations.
* Because HB 41 eliminates the absentee ID envelope, voters will now be able to scan their ballots through a tabulating machine. This machine provides instant feedback to the voter if they have made a mistake. The voter can then fix that mistake before the ballot is dropped into the box. As an optical scan county, it has always gotten under my skin that a voter in an electronic county is afforded a chance to review their ballot before casting it by virtue of that technology, while my voters are not. I cannot overstate the value and importance of this change. It will result in the enfranchisement of thousands of voters around Ohio. It is important to note that the ballot will be held under double lock and key and the results of these votes will not be tabulated or made known until 7:30 PM on Election Day (as per current law).
* Because HB 41 gets rid of superfluous paperwork, it eliminates the possibility that the voter would make a mistake on those forms.
* HB 41 also specifies that an in-person absentee voter may only be challenged by a poll worker at the time they are scanning their ballot. Currently law allows challenges to these voters to come from the public, something I believe should be done away with. Because a voter is presenting themselves in-person, the time to challenge that voter’s eligibility is at that point, and should rest with the election official, not the general public.

**A win for the taxpayers:**

* As noted above, HB 41 eliminates reams of unnecessary paperwork. Each of these forms costs boards of elections money to print, so getting rid of them will help save us money.

**A win for election administrators:**

* All of the changes mentioned above will help election officials perform their duties more efficiently. It goes without saying that the 28 days where this type of voting takes place are the busiest for us. Anything that helps us operate in a more cost-effective and time-effective manner is truly appreciated.

Last week, Representative Pelanda mentioned the possible inclusion of an amendment that would allow voters who do not have, or choose not to show, Election Day identification to fill out an absentee application. Upon completion and verification of this form, the voter would be able to cast a regular ballot, rather than a provisional ballot. I wholeheartedly endorse this amendment. In my role as president of my association, I have heard from boards of elections both large and small who think this is a great idea. In particular, low income voters who may not possess ID, as well as Amish voters who have religious objections to having their photo taken, will benefit from that amendment. It has always been my goal to make this concept as voter-friendly as possible, and the addition of this change clearly accomplishes this goal.

Finally, I have attached a spreadsheet that shows how people in your districts choose to cast an absentee ballot. It is strikingly clear that people in electronic counties prefer to use those machines to vote in-person, while those in optical scan counties prefer mail. It is my belief that the changes in HB 41 will encourage the casting of in-person absentee ballots. This process is more cost effective for boards than mailing the ballots, and provides that voter with that all-important chance to fix any mistakes. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.