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Sponsor Testimony on Senate Bill 149
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Minority Member Schiavoni, members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 149. This legislation will require schools that have been selected as polling locations to be closed to students the day elections are held. School districts may choose to utilize these election days as an in-service training day for faculty or simply close for the day.

The Bipartisan Commission on Election Administration has identified schools as the optimal location to hold elections due to their central and convenient locations, their accessibility for people with disabilities, and their ability to accommodate large numbers of voters. Schools in Ohio have long been utilized as polling locations due to these very reasons. The commission also states that security concerns continue to be the largest obstacle to the widespread use of schools, suggesting that state legislators take the necessary steps for their continued use. In addition to ensuring we are doing what is needed to uphold our nation's democratic process, the safety of our students must be maintained as well.

Holding students out of classes on election days will alleviate the safety concerns currently held by both parents and faculty. By making this change in our policy, Ohio will be able to continue to use schools as polling locations while simultaneously ensuring our student's safety remains a priority.

It is only reasonable to ensure that sufficient notice is provided to schools regarding an election being held on their property. I worked closely with the Board of Elections, the Department of Education, as well as local school boards to ensure ample notice is provided. Under this bill, the Board of Elections shall notify the Board of Education by January 1st of their plans to hold elections on school property. In the case of a special election, or a change in the Board of Elections calendar, a notice must be sent to the Board of Education as soon as possible to ensure all parties involved can make the proper arrangements.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.