**Proponent Testimony**

**SB 21**

**Ohio Association of Election Officials**

Chairman Coley, Vice-Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

My name is Tim Ward. I am Director of the Madison County Board of Elections and President of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEO). The OAEO is a bipartisan organization representing Ohio’s 88 county board of elections and their staffs. I would like to offer our association’s support for Senate Bill 21.

Prior to outlining our support for the legislation, please know that OAEO is aware of the substitute version of the bill, removing provisions dealing with the confirmation of deceased voters. While supportive of that particular provision, OAEO continues to support SB 21 after its removal from the bill.

The rest of the legislation deals with precinct election officials, commonly known as poll workers or booth workers. SB 21 gives boards of elections flexibility to reduce the number of poll workers at voting locations that 1) contain multiple precincts and 2) utilize electronic poll books. As members of this committee are certainly aware, the legislature recently appropriated nearly $14 million to partner with counties to purchase electronic poll books. To date 82 of Ohio’s 88 counties have participated in this highly successful program. The result has been to modernize our election system, save taxpayer dollars, ease the administration of elections for boards of elections and poll workers, and greatly enhance our voters’ experience at the polls. OAEO wholeheartedly thanks the General Assembly for making this possible.

Another recent change that has benefited our voters was the move to “any line, any time” voting. In short, when a voter enters his or her polling location, they no longer have to report directly to their precinct table to receive their ballot. This is because we are now able to put every voter assigned to that entire voting location into one electronic poll book. In the past, each precinct had its own poll books that contained only voters assigned to that particular precinct. Hence, a voter had to check-in at their exact precinct table or be redirected to their correct table. With two or more electronic poll books deployed at a location, and each containing the names of all registered voters in that location, voters can step up to the first available book, check in, and be handed their correct ballot or assigned to a voting machine.

The result of any line, any time voting and the utilization of electronic poll books has made our polling places extraordinarily efficient. For example, we are now able to check voters in quickly, in a matter of seconds rather than minutes. And the check-in process that used to require two poll workers per precinct can now be accomplished with only two or three workers per voting location. In some counties that have up to six precincts in one location, the need for poll workers to perform this function has gone from as many as twelve to as few as three.

Electronic poll books also create other efficiencies. E-poll books have the ability to look up voters who are in the wrong location and identify their correct voting location. They can even print off directions for the voter. This function that used to take a poll worker several minutes and entailed thumbing through a phone book sized document is now done with the click of a button. And as you can imagine, human error is eliminated entirely from the process. E-poll books also immediately flag provisional voters, print receipts that instruct poll workers which ballot to give to the voter, and have the ability to scan a voters’ drivers license in order to pull up his or her voter file. All of these used to be human endeavors and all have been automated. The effect, as you can clearly see, is efficiency and accuracy, both of which are of great benefit to poll workers and voters alike.

As a backdrop to these efficiencies is the real plight of boards of elections to recruit and retain qualified and capable poll workers. It is no secret that our poll worker population is aging, with the average age of our poll workers being close to 70. It is also true that poll workers represent our single largest Election Day expense. Ask any board of elections what their top five greatest challenges are and I guarantee every one of them will list poll workers. In the past, the legislature has been helpful to our requests for assistance in dealing with these issues. In the early 2000’s, the legislature approved a pay raise for poll workers. You have also granted public entities the ability to release their employees to work at the polls without having to take a vacation day. Finally, you have allowed 17 year-olds to work the polls, which has led to the creation of several highly successful youth at the booth programs around the state. SB 21 is the next, critical step this body can take to help us with this problem.

Let me close by addressing some concerns that have been raised by this committee in previous hearings. First, you should all be aware that the legislature has already allowed boards of elections to reduce the number of poll workers by up to 50% for special elections. This authority comes without the requirements of SB 21 to use e-poll books and only reduce poll workers at multi-precinct locations. I am aware of no problems arising from this current allowance. Second, this legislation in no way effects the requirement that polling locations be staffed in a bipartisan way. Should SB 21 pass, those portions of the law are still in full effect. Third, the legislation is permissive at the discretion of local boards of elections. Thus, any reduction of poll workers would be done in a bipartisan way and with the knowledge and consent of both major political parties. Finally, and most importantly, passing this legislation will not lead to increased lines. I have already outlined extensively the efficiencies we have gained in recent years. It is a fact that we can process the same number of voters in less time, using less people. As a local election official I understand that if I reduce my poll workers and the result is longer lines, I am likely going to lose my job. This reality is going to promote sensible application of the leniencies inherent in this bill.

I would like to personally thank Senator Uecker for his sponsorship of this legislation and leadership on this issue. I would also be remiss if I didn’t take this opportunity to urge you all to work the polls this fall to experience first-hand how the efforts of this legislature have positively impacted our polling location processes. Under state law, you are all permitted to do so, assuming you are not on the ballot for another elected office. Counties are currently in the process of recruiting these positions. And as I said, we are ALWAYS looking for more poll workers!

Mr. Chairman I truly appreciate the committee’s time and attention to this bill and my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee might have.