**HB 41 Proponent Testimony**

**Michelle Wilcox**

**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 Michelle Wilcox and I serve as Director of the Auglaize County Board of Elections as well as Second Vice-President of the Ohio Association of Election Officials. On behalf of my association, I wish to endorse the amendment before you today to HB 41. Please know up front that our bipartisan association believes that this amendment is of great benefit to the administration of elections in Ohio and expands the franchise of voting to all Ohioans.

Firstly, and nearest and dearest to my heart is a clarification to Ohio law concerning the recent appropriation of state dollars to counties in order to purchase new voting equipment. As signed into law, SB 135 appropriated $10 million in GRF to reimburse 14 Ohio counties who have already purchased voting equipment since January of 2014. Unfortunately, the way the language currently reads, counties are only eligible to receive the amount of the actual cost of their initial purchases, rather than the total amount appropriated for them in the bill.  In talking with Senator LaRose, we do not believe that it was the intention of the General Assembly to punish early adopters who may have purchased at a lower initial cost but who have incurred and are incurring additional costs of implementation and operation, some of which is necessarily associated with being first.  This amendment fixes that issue and allows these counties to fully draw down their already appropriated dollars.  This amendment does not cost the state any more money!

The second change we support moves the start date for uniformed overseas and military voters from 45 days before to the election to 46 days before the election. This expansion of the franchise for what we refer to as “UOCAVA” voters is a great thing. As it turns out, 45 days before the election always falls on a Saturday. This means that boards of elections are forced to stay open on the weekend and pay overtime to staff who are on hand to mail these ballots out. Moving the start date to 46 days (Friday) allows us to process these ballots during normal business hours at no extra expense to taxpayers and gives our overseas voters an additional day to vote!

Finally, we wish to endorse the amendment’s treatment of the days and hours of early in-person absentee voting. This provision generated much discussion and debate amongst our members. We commend the legislature for reallocating the six hours that we are currently required to be open for voting on the Monday before the election to the two weekends prior to the election. We want voters to have access to those extra hours. However, it is imperative for the integrity of the election, that in-person voting end the Sunday before the election. This is because boards of elections have to discern who has voted early and update our poll books that go out to precincts to reflect that those votes have been cast. Otherwise, it would be possible for a voter to cast an absentee ballot the Monday before the election and show up in the precinct poll books as not having done so. The voter could then show up at the polls on Tuesday and vote again. Please understand that I am not suggesting that this happens frequently or even at all, but it is important for Ohio law to limit this possibility from existing. Allowing us to “close the books” on in-person absentee voting on Sunday will give us the opportunity to update our poll books to see who voted right before Election Day and get that information out to the polls in time to accurately open them up at 6:30 am on Tuesday. As one election director put it “this change would allow us to better serve the vast majority of our voters who vote on Election Day, while reallocating the Monday hours to those who want to vote over the weekend while they are not at work and can more easily cast their ballot”.

The remainder of the amendment serves to further extend the voting franchise by expanding and adding to the early voting hours for gubernatorial elections while keeping the same hours available to voters that currently exist for presidential, special and off-year elections. In short, the amendment expands upon our already generous early voting period. We think this is a good thing and we encourage you to embrace this change to offer more voting hours to our electorate.

Mr. Chairman, there is a lot to discuss here and I am happy to answer any questions the committee might have.