



**Representatives Erica C. Crawley & Bride Rose Sweeney**

House State and Local Government Committee

Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 398

December 8, 2020

---

**REP. CRAWLEY:**

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 398, which would establish the day of the general election as a legal holiday for which certain government employees would receive paid leave.

This legislation is crucial as we just witnessed with this year's historical election, the long lines on Election Day that were due to the unprecedented voter turnout and issues at polling locations. Despite the global pandemic, voters showed up at the polls. Although, because of the long wait times, some people were forced to leave and return later due to their work obligations.

In a 2018 Pew Research study, 65% of Americans were in favor of making Election Day a holiday.<sup>1</sup> As legislators we must create a legislative agenda that puts our constituent's viewpoints in the forefront. HB 398 would align with the public's priorities and would allow for democracy to happen as intended.

Earlier this year, a national poll revealed that nearly 50% of Americans felt that they would experience difficulties with voting in the 2020 election.<sup>2</sup> Ohioans deserve to have a wider range of accessibility and convenience when it comes to voting. We need to remove barriers that suppress voters and establishing Election Day as a legal holiday is an integral step in moving towards a more equitable democracy. HB 398 would officially make voting a priority and would enhance civic culture.

By enacting Election Day as a legal holiday statewide, thousands of Ohioans would have the opportunity to vote without worrying about missing work. HB 398 would equalize the opportunity and access to voting across the board and many Ohioans who otherwise would not have the ability to vote, will now have a chance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of HB 398. I'll now hand it off to my joint sponsor, Representative Sweeney.

**REP. SWEENEY:**

Thank you, Rep. Crawley and thank you Chairman and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify. Continuing where my joint sponsor left off, I believe it's important to note that most other industrialized democratic nations vote on weekends rather than weekdays, and

---

<sup>1</sup> "Views of election policy proposals." Pew Research Center.

<sup>2</sup> "Election 2020: Voters Are Highly Engaged, but Nearly Half Expect To Have Difficulties Voting." Pew Research Center.

many have higher rates of participation in their elections to show for it. Only eight other advanced democracies have weekday elections, and two of those already have a national voting holiday.<sup>3</sup> So, why are we different? To put it simply, America has a rich history of voting on Tuesdays, particularly due to our time-honored agricultural traditions, and it would require federal action to change that.

While the national status quo is what it is, at the state level we can help Ohioans vote in-person more easily. Single parents, those who punch a clock for minimum wage, and those who work more than one job, often face different obstacles to voting than many other Ohioans do. That difference is not hypothetical. In 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 one of the most common reasons cited for not voting was having a conflict or being too busy. If this body really wants to make in-person voting more accessible for every Ohioan, no matter their income, race, or religion, then Election Day should be a state holiday.

Recently, the City of Sandusky was the first in the nation to make Election Day a local, legal holiday by swapping it with Columbus Day. Sandusky's decision currently affects 250 city employees.<sup>4</sup> Like in so many other areas, the public sector can pilot a policy that paves the way for the private sector. Generating buy-in from Ohio businesses would be very important for a meaningful voting holiday so that it can be truly effective for all Ohio workers.

The majority of people still vote in-person in most elections, and it is important that the option to vote in-person be made as accessible as possible for everyone, no matter your job or circumstance. Neighboring states have enacted similar legislation, including Michigan, Kentucky, and Indiana. After making this change, Michigan saw the highest voter turnout in nearly 50 years for a midterm. Voting on Election Day also gives voters more time to make up their mind in our rapidly changing world.

As elected representatives, it is our duty to protect the rights of Ohioans. At the core of our rights is the right to vote in free and fair elections. Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 398. We would be happy to take any questions you may have.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/06/weekday-elections-set-the-u-s-apart-from-many-other-advanced-democracies/>

<sup>4</sup> "Sandusky, Ohio, Makes Election Day A Paid Holiday — By Swapping Out Columbus Day." NPR.