To: Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee

From: Camille Wimbish, Ohio Voter Rights Coalition

Re: Interested Party Testimony SB 22

Date: March 12, 2019

My name is Camille Wimbish and I am testifying on behalf of The Ohio Voter Rights Coalition, a network of non-partisan voter advocates committed to modern, secure and accessible elections. We are providing interested party testimony today because we have concerns with SB 22 in its current form.

This legislation permits voting locations using electronic poll books to reduce the minimum number of poll workers from four to two. We acknowledge that electronic poll books can improve the efficiency of the voter check in process, which is why we testified in support of funding for e-poll books back in 2015. However, we also acknowledge that this is a relatively new technology for many counties, and poll workers could benefit from having additional experience and training on the new procedures.

Technology is not a Substitute for Poll Workers
If there are fewer poll workers available, our concern is voters will encounter long lines or will even be disenfranchised because they can not get the assistance they need. On Election Day 2018, members of the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition operated the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline, a non-partisan election protection hotline for voters. Several counties reported problems with the electronic poll books. We had numerous reports from voters in Ashtabula, Geauga, Licking, Montgomery, Summit, Stark, and Trumbull Counties, who were told they had requested absentee ballots when they had not done so. This false notification was a result of an electronic poll book vendor error. Electronic poll books are not fool-proof and when problems occur, having additional poll workers on hand to troubleshoot is critical.

Voting machines also caused significant problems in Hamilton County in 2018 due to a new message that alerted voters to an "under-vote" or race that was left blank. This caused major disruptions because poll workers were needed to stand at the scanners to explain the issue to voters and catch voters who were mistakenly leaving before the machines accepted their ballots. This is another prime example of how problems can occur at the polls and how poll workers are needed to minimize the delays. If there had been only 2 poll workers per precinct on hand, how would they have been able to effectively guide voters through the process?

Permit the staffing reductions based on population
If poll worker reductions are made, we suggest making staff reductions optional for county boards of elections with fewer than 100,000 registered voters. Smaller counties may require fewer poll workers to service voters, which would result in a significant cost-savings. However, in larger and more diverse counties there is more transience, poll worker reductions could have a negative impact. If there are only two poll workers per precinct available in a busy polling location, disabled voters and voters with limited language proficiency may not receive needed support.

Pilot Changes in a few Counties
If this committee does move forward with poll worker reductions, we propose that these changes are not made all at once and for all of Ohio's 88 counties. Alternatives such as piloting these reductions during a non-presidential year, or among a small sampling of counties are preferable to determine the impact of these changes.

Codify the EAP Requirement
We propose amending the code to require that county boards of elections submit an Election Administration Plan outlining how e-poll books will affect staffing needs. For several years, Boards of Elections have been submitting election administration plans (EAPs) to the Secretary of State detailing how they have prepared for the election, including poll worker recruitment, voting machine allocation, and security. This requirement should be codified as it is an effective tool for election planning for contingencies. E-poll book content should at a minimum, consideration of the number of voters assigned to the polling place, whether there has been a recent change in polling places, expected Election Day turnout, and whether that polling place has experienced problems or long lines in the past. Having a concrete and thoughtful planning process for reducing poll worker staffing when using electronic poll books will instill greater voter confidence and make Boards of Elections better equipped to prevent long lines in the event technology fails.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Camille Wimbish
Ohio Voter Rights Coalition