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HB 458 Sponsor Testimony

Chair Merrin, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking member Sobecki, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 458. This is a bipartisan approach aimed to eliminate the August Special elections in an effort to save taxpayer money.

Currently, August special elections are sometimes held to fill vacant seats at various levels of government. Under current law, local political subdivisions may also place tax levies on the ballot at these historically low voter turnout elections. This amounts to gaming the system and trying to pass levies when most of the electorate is not engaged in the process. This bill would aim to stop this cycle of a small minority of the community deciding important tax levies during these elections. The premise of the bill and goal is quite simple: to eliminate the ability of having a "Special election" in August, except when held to nominate or elect candidates for the United States House of Representatives.

The language included in the bill is largely definitions and terms, but the premise is still clear. There are notable exceptions included in this bill that allow for a special election to be held under certain circumstances. The first exception continues to allow the Governor to call an election in August to fill vacant seats in places like Congress, the U.S. Senate, and other offices deemed necessary. Additionally, there will be an opportunity to allow local communities or political subdivisions to piggyback their levies onto these special elections if they agree to pay their apportioned share of the election costs. Lastly, if a local community or political subdivision is going into fiscal emergency, they would be eligible to hold an election in August.

Unless there are unique circumstances, we should have two elections a year in Ohio: a primary election, and a general election. August special elections are costly to taxpayers and fail to engage a meaningful amount of the electorate in the process. They should be eliminated from the elections calendar.

By way of example, the Huron County Board of Elections tells me that it would cost them \$67,000 to conduct a county-wide special election, with the Director and Deputy Director

allotting over 1,000 hours to the task. This is time that could be used to clean up the voter rolls, enter voter registrations into the database or conduct voter outreach and education. Fairfield County held a special election in August of 2020 for a village income tax. 278 of 1300 voters cast ballots at a cost of \$33.21 per vote.

The idea for this bill came from one of my county commissioners. After talking with him, I then met with our local board of elections. Their bipartisan team was also very supportive of this idea due to the amount of money involved in these August Special elections. It is also then where I learned that our very Chairman, Chair Merrin, has introduced a bill very similar the last two general assemblies. I want to also point out, Secretary of State Frank LaRose is supportive of this initiative, as well as the Ohio Association of Election Officials. I would like to thank the association for their help in crafting this piece of legislation that is being considered here today.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 458 and I would be happy to take any questions at this time.