

## ***HB 458 – Ending Unnecessary Special Elections, Proponent Testimony***

Chairperson Gavarone, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for House Bill 458.

Just last week, a little over 51% of Ohioans cast a ballot in our General Election. And as you know, in 2022 we had an election in August that was both the Primary Election for members of the legislature and, in some local jurisdictions, a special election on an issue. The statewide turnout for the August 2022 election was just 8% which unfortunately is not unusual for an August election.

Two years ago, in November of 2020, Ohioans set a record for voter turnout – 74 percent of all registered voters made their voice heard.

But just a few months earlier that same year, in August of 2020, a special election occurred in Hamilton County where voter turnout was only 11.8%. On that same day, Cuyahoga County had their own special election. Their voter turnout? Just 6.8%.

These are just some examples of chronically low turnout elections when voters aren't expecting an election to occur – and that is bad news for the civic health of our state. This important piece of legislation will fix it.

These embarrassingly low voter turnout rates in the last two August elections are not an anomaly. Far more often than not, this is normal among counties that have an August special election. Voters just don't turn out.

That means just a handful of voters end up making big decisions, either on candidates or more often, on local ballot issues. The side that wins is often the one that has a vested interest in the passage of the issue up for consideration.

This isn't how democracy is supposed to work. More importantly, it doesn't have to. Voters are just as capable of voting on these important issues during the standard primary and general elections and there is no reason why these contests can't happen at the regularly scheduled primary and general elections which occur twice a year.

This is important not just for our communities, but for the success of our 88 county boards of elections. An August special election requires these boards to undergo a full election planning process, including recruiting and training poll workers, staffing early voting periods, and rigorous testing of equipment. These preparations are wasteful and cost the taxpayers precious scarce resources. What's worse, the boards often have little notice or time to prepare for such elections.

Simply put, an August Special election is the last thing election officials should be dealing with as they ready themselves for an important November election that begins with the start of overseas and military voting in September and early voting in October. These unnecessary "off-cycle" elections aren't good for taxpayers, election officials, voters or the civic health of our state. It's time for them to go!

Importantly, both the County Commissioners Association of Ohio and the Ohio Association of Election Officials are both supportive of this bill. These are bipartisan organizations that are serving as advocates for this legislation not just because it will make it easier to run successful elections, but because it is in the best interest of the voters.

I'd like to thank Representative Hall for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. Thank you again to the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 458.