

Proponent Testimony
HB 458
Ohio Association of Election Officials

Chairwoman Gavarone, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee:

My name is Terry Burton and I am Director of the Wood County Board of Elections and legislative co-chair of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEO). The OAEO is a bipartisan organization representing Ohio's 88 local boards of elections. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our support for HB 458 and thank the bill's sponsor, Representative Hall, for bringing this legislation forward.

Our reasons for supporting this bill are twofold; 1) the cost-benefit analysis of special elections demonstrates that August special elections are a costly and an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars, and 2) both the voters and taxpayers would be better served by limiting elections to two days a year, when efficiencies can be gained, and turnout can be maximized.

August special elections require boards of elections to undergo the FULL planning process for an election; no different than a primary or general election. This requires recruitment of poll workers, procurement of voting locations, hiring of additional staff to support early voting hours, testing of voting equipment, as well as all the other myriad tasks that go into the planning and execution of an election. All this effort routinely results in a voter turnout well below 20%, sometimes even less than 10%. Thus, the "cost-per-vote" is greatly increased.

What this means is that taxpayers through the subdivisions that file for Special Elections end up funding inefficient, costly elections. Subdivisions that piggyback onto Primary and General elections currently find these costs greatly reduced or in some cases almost entirely eliminated. In addition, voter turnout is almost always higher (often multiple times higher) during these elections, so the "cost-per-vote" is greatly reduced.

It should also be noted that boards are frequently unaware of August special elections until paperwork is filed 90 days prior to the election. Thus, it is impossible for boards to appropriately budget for these elections, and county commissioners are put in the unenviable position of having to find unbudgeted money to support these elections. While it is true that recent changes to state law require subdivisions to prepay 65% of the estimated cost of these elections, the county still bears the burden of the remainder, and again, this is almost always unbudgeted money that is not recouped until the following budget year.

While it is undeniable that August special elections create administrative burdens for local boards of elections, we are not here to cry foul over additional work. In today's world, long hours, constant stress and difficult job conditions are expected by election officials. However, it is fair to state that, were special elections eliminated, our time could be spent on other tasks that can be better accomplished when we are not in the throes of an election. We must maintain our voter rolls. We must enter new voter registrations into the system, update voter history, and maintain files and information. We must check petition signatures for statewide questions and issues. These are the tasks that we can only perform, without hiring additional staff, if we have time between the primary and general elections. These are the tasks that we will be able to exclusively focus on should HB 458 be enacted.

Madam Chairwoman, Ohio would be well served to hold two elections a year, and HB 458 is a strong step in that direction. We encourage its passage. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee might have.