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TO: Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
FROM: Greer Aeschbury, Ohio Campaign Manager, All Voting is Local Action
DATE: 12/9/2022
RE: Substitute House Bill 458– Opponent Testimony (Written only)

To Chairwoman Gavarone, Vice Chairwoman O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and the members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on substitute House Bill 458 (HB 458). My name is Greer Aeschbury, Ohio Campaign Manager for All Voting is Local Action (AVL Action). Our organization fights for policies to ensure that every voice is heard. Expanding pathways to voter registration and accessing in-person and mail voting are critical to the health of our democracy, and that's why our organization is opposed to HB 458.

As voting advocates and experts who have called for changes to our election process for years, we were dismayed to find that a drastic, expensive, unnecessary new amendment was added to HB 458 at the last minute. HB 458 would be a fundamental change to our election system resulting in the disenfranchisement of vulnerable Ohio voters.

Before we dive into the details of this bill, I want to reiterate what our own top elections official, the Secretary of State, has reported about Ohio's elections. Our 2020 Election was 99.98% accurate in post election audits. He has reported no cases of voter impersonation. Our current voter identification system works extremely well. The result of the proposed changes in HB 458 are unwarranted and will only serve to disenfranchise voters.

As other testimonies have pointed out, this bill, especially the strict voter ID rules, will pose a serious burden to voters. Ohio already has a disproportionately high number of provisional ballots. These voter ID changes will surely increase our provisional ballot usage because many Ohioans will show up to the polls unaware of the need for additional identification. They will then cast a provisional ballot and will have 7 days to return to the Board of Elections to verify their identity. If they do have the proper ID, that will place an increased burden on Boards of Elections, who instead of counting and certifying ballots, will be forced to use precious staff time to verify IDs. For voters who may have a license that has expired, lost their license, or had their license revoked, for example, their vote will be discarded. This is unacceptable. The only requirement to vote in Ohio is to be 18 years of age or older and to be a citizen. The lack of a



specific type of ID, especially when we have years worth of data showing our alternate forms of ID work, is an unjust disenfranchisement of voters.

This bill will have a particular impact on college students, senior citizens and those who have had their license revoked. Out of state college students would have to go through an additional step of acquiring an Ohio ID, which would serve no other purpose to them than to vote. Senior citizens who may not drive would have to go through the process to acquire a state ID as well. This would involve finding transportation to the BMV and going through absolutely unnecessary steps to get a state ID, which again, they would not use for anything other than voting. Those who are transient or perhaps have had their ID suspended for a minor driving violation would also be submitted to these burdens. We have no analysis of the cost of the state IDs, nor of the administrative cost and burden for each person who must unnecessarily jump through these hoops for a state ID.

Instead of erecting barriers to voting, Ohio should create an automatic voter registration system. This would remove administrative burden and financial barriers for voters and for state employees— and create a more accurate voter roll— all while improving our democratic process.

Additionally, even if a voter manages to successfully cast their ballot with the requisite ID, this bill adds a further loophole that puts their ballot in danger of not being counted: requiring absentee ballots to be returned by 7:30pm on Election Day. This eliminates the 10 day grace period that exists currently. An unlucky voter whose ballot takes a few extra days to arrive in the mail, will have their ballot destroyed. If a ballot is destroyed, a voter would be in danger of being flagged as “inactive” on the voter rolls. This could result in a voter’s registration being canceled through no fault of their own. Thus, not even saving them from the voter purge list. The impact? Disenfranchisement of voters and the potential to wrongfully remove voters from the voter rolls.

Further exacerbating the problem, this bill also restricts the operation of drop boxes to only during business hours. One of the great benefits of drop boxes has been the ability of voters to access them outside of normal business hours, perhaps on their way home from work or early in the morning before dropping their kids off at school. Now, if a voter is concerned about their mail delivery arriving before the close of Election Day, and does not have easy access to the Board of Elections during business hours, they are left without a clear option for casting their ballot. This is inexcusable. Just like the other problems with this bill, Ohio already has solutions to these problems: 24/7 drop box access and a 10 day grace period after election day.

Further impacting senior voters, this bill continues the prohibition on grandchildren returning their grandparents absentee ballots. It also prohibits prepaid postage of ballots and prohibits



courtesy mailings of absentee ballot applications. So instead of alleviating barriers to voting, this bill heaps on several, making it more difficult to request your absentee ballot. For those without internet access, you will have to print and mail back a ballot request form. After receiving your ballot, you will be required to either buy stamps and return it by mail, hoping that it arrives by 7:30pm on Election Day, or find time during business hours to go to the Board of Elections. It should be clear that these barriers will specifically impact the elderly, especially those who do not drive, and those in rural parts of Ohio who may lack quality internet service and be located far away from their Board of Elections. These restrictions fall disproportionately on older and rural Ohioans.

Ironically, the solution exists in current practice and best practices from other states: Ohio should have multiple early voting locations and 24/7 drop boxes throughout the county so voters have easy access to vote early or return their ballots.

In recent years, Ohio has seen a decrease in long lines on Election Day. Even in 2020, our highest turnout election ever, most Ohioans had positive voting experiences on Election Day, and that was no doubt because of the much greater use of early and absentee voting spurred by the pandemic. This year's record-setting early voting proved that even without pandemic restrictions, Ohioans prefer to vote early. In fact, this seems to help our system work better by decreasing volume on Election Day.

The cumulative effect of the changes in HB 458 will be an increase in pressure on our electoral system and our Boards of Elections. We will see an increased administrative burden for state employees and for individual voters. Meanwhile, voters will be disenfranchised by arbitrary ID requirements and absentee deadlines and obstacles. This is not the way to protect Ohio's democracy and protect our freedom to vote. We urge you to vote no on HB 458. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.