

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 467.

My name is Bobbie Arnold, and I am the Democratic candidate for the Ohio House 40th district. I filed my petitions and Declaration of Candidacy on the 18th of December 2023, and they were certified on January 2, 2024. I was informed on January 8th that news reporters had contacted the Montgomery County Board of Elections asking about my petitions following the disqualification of Vanessa Joy's petitions for not including her former name, and that although there was no protest to my petitions they were going to be revisited by the board for the same reason. At the review hearing on January 17th, Board of Elections Director Jeff Rezabeck pointed out to the board that the requirement for a candidate to include their former name on their petitions was not listed in the candidate guide, nor was there enough space to include both current and former names on the petitions. He also said that the board always asks if the individuals signing the petitions were misled as to who they were signing for or what position that candidate was running for, and that in this case he did not believe they were. He then recommended the board take no action and the board unanimously decided to leave me on the ballot.

I filed for my name change through the Probate Court in Preble County, Ohio in December 2020. As a part of that process we are required to prove residency, show valid reason, publish a notice of the hearing in the local paper at least 30 days prior to the hearing, to disclose financial status and criminal activity, and to have a public hearing resulting in adjudication. As a person of trans experience, I went through the process to change my name on legal documents to better reflect who I am as an individual, and because I had already been using my full name since 2015. To use my former name would not only be misrepresenting who I am, but the requirement could be painful and pose safety issues for many transgender Ohioans.

In comparison, the court process is significantly more entailing than changing a name as the result of marriage, which is an exclusion to the requirement to include past names on the petitions. Adding an exception for name changes granted by Ohio courts will address our concerns without compromising the election process. And adding the requirement into the candidate guide and making space for the candidates to comply would ensure that both future candidates and election officials are aware of the requirement.

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 467. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.