

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 467 Before the Government Oversight Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives, May 21, 2024

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 467.

My name is Tony Schroeder. I am a Member of the Putnam County Board of Elections. I was first appointed to the Board of Elections in March of 2016.

I speak today in opposition to House Bill 467, because I believe the electorate should have as much information as possible about the candidates who are seeking their votes.

My observation from years of watching precinct returns come in on Election Night is that Ohio's voters are prudent - they vote for candidates and issues that they know and understand, and will not vote for unknown candidates and issues. In effect, they are actively *not* voting for certain offices or issues because of a lack of information. What this means is that many of the ballots we process have a hidden participant: the undervote. Voters will cast votes on one or more ballot lines and leave the others blank. Very likely, some of these undervotes are intentional - dislike of all candidates, or an informed lack of interest. But, the great majority of undervotes are the result of prudence; voters do not want to make a mistake and simply choose to leave the line blank.

As a result, races are often “won” by the undervote, as the listed candidates earn fewer total votes than the number of votes not cast on that ballot line. Improving this situation requires more, not less, information.

Two of the most important sources of information for our voters are the candidate petition and the ballot itself. Boards of Elections are required to prepare and vote to approve ballots well in advance of Election Day, and to make sample ballots available for review, so that voters have the opportunity to see their ballot before arriving at their polling place.

And this is the key reason for the existing statutory requirement to list prior names on the candidate petition - voters should have the opportunity to fully vet a candidate who is asking for their vote. The more voters know about a candidate, the more likely they are to vote for that candidate or to choose another candidate.

I would ask you to remember that hidden participant, the undervote, and to vote in favor of more, not less, information for the electorate.