

Testimony for Ohio State Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee June 10, 2015 at 8:45 AM

My name is Archita Taylor, and I am a staff attorney with the Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN), a national, nonpartisan voting rights and election reform organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies, and improving overall election administration. Since 2006, our organization has been involved in supporting election reform efforts and working with non-partisan organizations to remove barriers to voting and increase voter participation. As a member of the Ohio Fair Elections Network (OFEN), comprised of a number of groups and individuals invested in ensuring access to the ballot box, I submit this testimony on behalf of FELN to urge you support Senator LaRose's bill, SB 63, which would create system of online voter registration (OVR) in Ohio.

Senator LaRose's bill would allow an eligible Ohio voter to use her Ohio driver's license number, Ohio ID card number, or the last four digits of her Social Security Number to submit a voter registration application through an online portal. The system would also ask for verification that the voter has resided in Ohio for at least 30 days prior to the next election, she is a US citizen, and is at least 18 years old before the next election. The legislation would also allow the Secretary of State to obtain an electronic copy of the applicant's signature if it's on file with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to be used as the signature on the applicant's voter registration records for elections and signature-matching purposes.

Online voter registration has been implemented or is in the process of implementation in 27 states and the District of Columbia. The benefits to OVR are numerous and it is time that Ohio joins the majority of states in the country to move forward in improving election administration and voters' access to registering and voting.

One of the many benefits of implementing OVR is the increased convenience for voters. Voters are accustomed to completing many important tasks online, including banking and interacting with state agencies such as the DMV. Through the use of online registration, voters can apply or update their registration information in a timely and convenient manner, and through a medium with which they are already familiar and comfortable. The convenience of online registration can also draw in more voters. Arizona, the first state to implement OVR, has reported an increase of 9.5% in voter registration since first implementing OVR in 2002. According to a UC Davis Center for Regional Change study, turnout among Californians who registered online was eight percentage points higher than those who registered on paper.

Moving to an online registration system also improves accuracy of the voter rolls. By reducing the number of handwritten voter registration cards and data entry by local officials, there are fewer errors in processing applications and thus, more accurate voter rolls. Using an online registration system allows voters to directly input their information into the registration system and to ensure that they are submitting correct information and spelling for registration. Maricopa County, Arizona, one of the first jurisdictions to use online registration in the United States, found that paper-based registration forms were five times more likely to introduce errors into the registration process than paperless registration processes.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to implement online voter registration is the cost savings associated with moving to an online system from a paper system. States can save significant amounts of taxpayer dollars by connecting the DMV to the statewide registration system, thereby eliminating many of the registration process costs created by the “motor voter” section of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). Savings are also generated from eliminating printing costs, as well as freeing valuable staffing resources for more pressing election preparation activities as early voting and Election Day nears. In Washington State, the cost of an online voter registration application is just \$.45, compared to a cost of \$1.55 for every paper registration processed.

Furthermore, Ohio already has a system whereby voters can update their voter registration information if they have moved within the state. Senator LaRose’s legislation would put in place a system whereby new Ohio voters would access to the same types of technology and resources that current Ohio voters already utilize.

To increase convenience to voters, improve accuracy of the voter rolls, and increase cost savings, among many other benefits, this committee should, without delay, approve the passage of this online voter registration legislation. I sincerely hope you will take these comments into consideration as you further discuss SB 63.

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