

## **Testimony for Ohio State Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee June 24, 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. To this end, we are 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.

At a previous meeting of this Committee, I submitted testimony supporting Senator LaRose's bill, SB 63, to create a system of online voter registration (OVR) in Ohio. I submit this testimony to reiterate FELN's interest in the passage and implementation of OVR legislation in the State of Ohio. I would like to briefly reiterate some of the many benefits of OVR and review a couple of points of potential improvement in Sen. LaRose's legislation.

SB 63 would allow an eligible Ohio voter to use her Ohio driver's license number or Ohio ID card number to submit a voter registration application through an online portal. 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 (BMV) to be used as the signature on the applicant's voter registration records for elections and signature-matching purposes.

Some of the many benefits of implementing OVR include its improved accuracy over paper registration forms, tremendous cost savings, and the increased convenience to voters. Maricopa County, Arizona, one of the first jurisdictions to use online registration after Arizona implemented it in 2002, found that paper-based registration forms were five times more likely to introduce errors into the registration process than paperless registration processes. 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. Finally, 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.

This legislation goes a long way in ensuring that more eligible Ohio voters have easy access to voter registration in the state. To improve the accessibility of the OVR portal proposed under this legislation and increase its reach to even more voters, including more voters of limited means, FELN would recommend this Committee revise this legislation to include provisions for OVR access for those without state-issued IDs. The state-issued ID provision primarily serves the purpose of transferring an electronic signature already on file with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to a voter registration form. The state can obtain a voter's signature or verify her eligibility in ways beyond the signature transfer from the BMV. For example, the legislation can be modified to allow an applicant without a state ID to provide her signature using a tablet or smart phone (much like the process used for banking and merchandise transactions), upload an image file of her signature, or provide a signature on file with any other state agency. Alternatively, the

legislation can include a provision to allow the applicant to print, sign, and physically mail her registration form or provide just the last four digits of her Social Security number in lieu of her electronic signature. We believe this improvement to the legislation will allow for increased accessibility of the online registration system.

More than half the states in the country have already passed OVR legislation and have already implemented or are in the process of implementation. 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.

To improve accuracy of the voter rolls, increase cost savings, and increase convenience to voters, 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.

Archita Taylor  
Fair Elections Legal Network  
1825 K Street NW, Suite 450  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
Phone: (202) 331-0114  
[ataylor@fairelectionsnetwork.com](mailto:ataylor@fairelectionsnetwork.com)