

EXHIBIT R

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio Association of Election Officials
SB 238

Chairman Burke, Ranking members Smith and members of the Senate State Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

My name is Aaron Ockerman. I am Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEO) and am here to offer my association's thoughts on SB 238. As you are aware OAEO is a bipartisan organization comprised of the members of Ohio's 88 county boards of elections, directors, deputy directors and staff.

In March of 2013, the trustees of the OAEO endorsed a plan for reforming and improving Ohio's absentee voting system. Our trustees consist of 20 members, those being 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans, 10 staff members and 10 board members. They come from large, medium and small counties from all over the state. I note this because we believe that any changes to the absentee voting system must consider the impact it will have on all 88 counties, and our trustees are truly representative of our entire state. The recommendations call for both in-person absentee voting and mail-in absentee voting to begin the day after the close of registration. In most elections this will be 29 days before the election, but in some it will be 28 days before the election. Thus, while we support the direction SB 238 takes us, we would ask that the bill be amended to specifically reflect that recommendation.

While we understand that reducing the number of days of absentee voting may not be "politically correct," my members are not concerned about the politics of this proposal, but rather the policy reasons it makes sense. First, Ohio is an outlier in

the days it allows for absentee voting to be conducted. Some states do not allow any in-person voting, while most allow 10 or 15 days of in-person voting. Those states that do allow in-person early voting presumably understand and accept what Ohio's election officials also recognize to be true; absentee voting is a good thing, if reasonable parameters are put in place.

Prior to 2006, Ohio only allowed very limited in-person and mail-in absentee voting. In opening up absentee voting in the way that we have, we are effectively now running three elections in Ohio. The first is Election Day. The second is 35 days of early in-person voting. The third is a mail-in election. We believe the consequences of this change have been profound for voters and election administrators alike.

First, Ohio has arguably the most convenient system of voting in the country. We are justifiably proud of this. However, despite this convenience, our voter turnout numbers have dropped not risen, while the cost of administering elections has skyrocketed. This makes many election administrators and county commissioners ask the prudent question, "as stewards of our taxpayers' dollars, where is the return on investment, and are we using our limited resources as effectively as possible?" While we are not suggesting that money is the only, or even most important factor in setting election law, to not take it into consideration would be irresponsible. My members take their responsibility to spend other people's money very seriously, and are always looking for ways to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The second effect has been a noticeable reduction in Election Day lines. Large counties in particular attribute this to the rise of in-person and mail-in absentee voting. However, given the

facts outlined above, they are also asking if there is a way to more effectively use their resources and achieve these same positive results.

Our trustees reached the conclusion that boards of elections can continue to be ultra-customer friendly and reduce lines on Election Day while being more efficient with our tax payer dollars. The way to do this was to reasonably shorten the period for casting absentee ballots in the manner I have outlined above.

A second reason for shortening the absentee voting period is to close what has come to be known as "Golden Week," a 5 day period of time where a voter can register to vote and cast a regular (ie. not provisional) ballot at the same time. While this unique confluence of laws has existed on the books for some time, it was greatly exacerbated when Ohio moved to no-fault absentee voting. Ohio law does not allow for this activity known as "same day registration" to occur on Election Day and a statewide ballot attempt to allow for this was resoundingly rejected by voters when it was put before them. Ohio has a registration system and a registration deadline for very clear purposes, namely so that we can confirm that a voter is who they say they are before they cast a ballot.

The overlap between the close of registration and the beginning of early in-person absentee voting places this system of checks and balances in jeopardy. I have had first hand conversations with election officials who have had votes count by people who fraudulently registered during this period, because the election officials could not confirm their registration status before Election Day. Only after their ballot was counted did they discover that the registration was fraudulent, but by then it was too late to do anything about it.

People from both political parties who led reform efforts in 2009 and 2010 understood that this was an issue. Bills sponsored by members of both parties passed their respective chambers with provisions to remedy this included.

For these reasons, we believe SB 238, with the aforementioned amendments, is deserving of passage. This concludes my written testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee might have.