



TESTIMONY OF PROJECT VOTE ON SUBSTITUTE S.B. 295
Government Reform and Oversight Committee Ohio Senate
Wednesday, March 21, 2012

My name is Camille Wimbish, Election Counsel and Manager of the Ohio Election Administration Program for Project Vote. Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in historically underrepresented communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on substitute S.B. 295, a bill that seeks to repeal H.B. 194, which is subject to referendum.

While the legislature stands ready to repeal H.B. 194, repeal is sensible only if the legislature abandons any future plans to re-introduce provisions of H.B. 194. More than 300,000 Ohio voters have signed a petition to put the H.B. 194 referendum on the ballot. The petition constitutes an unequivocal endorsement of voting rights. It constitutes the people's rejection of the notion that voting rights should be constricted. The people's opposition to H.B. 194 must be honored.

Although the legislature categorizes the action contemplated as a "straight repeal," in actuality, substitute S.B. 295 imposes restrictions that are not included in H.B. 194. The substitute bill changes the deadline for in person absentee voting from the Monday before the election, to the Friday before the election. This is a recodification of H.B. 224, a bill that was originally intended to only apply to military and overseas voters. If it is this committee's intention to repeal all of H.B. 194, the full period of in person absentee voting should be restored. Boards of Elections should be permitted to allow citizens to vote in person the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday before the election. Historically, these have been among the days when absentee voting is in the greatest demand by voters.

Finally, we also cannot over-emphasize how confusing it would be for both voters and poll workers if replacement legislation is passed and election rules abruptly change between the primary and general election. Indeed, the Secretary of State once called for a simple repeal of H.B. 194 and to delay passing any election reform until after the November 2012 election, due to the confusion that replacement legislation would unleash among voters and election officials.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge you to fully repeal H.B. 194, to remove the provision in H.B. 224 that shortens the early voting period, and to ensure that the voting laws remain unchanged this November. Thank you.