

To: House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee  
From: Ohio Fair Elections Network  
Date: January 19, 2016  
Re: Proponent Testimony SB 63

### Testimony for the Ohio House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee

We are members of the Ohio Fair Elections Network (OFEN), comprised of a number of groups and individuals invested in ensuring access to the ballot box. Using modern technology to improve Ohio's election administration practices will remove barriers to voting and increase participation. Plus, modernization offers numerous other benefits for officials and the state as a whole. Online voter registration (OVR) is a key component in a fair, secure, effective election system. We have previously submitted testimony on this issue. We appreciate the opportunity to briefly reiterate some of the many benefits of OVR and review a couple of points of potential improvement in the proposed legislation.

This proposed law 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.

In January of 2014, the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA) announced its unanimous recommendations to improve elections in the United States, which included expanding access to online voter registration. The PCEA's strong bipartisan support is based upon this reform's success in resolving numerous election problems.

Some of the many benefits of implementing OVR include its increased efficiency and tremendous cost savings. Online registration eliminates one part of election officials' job that is especially onerous and error-prone, and thus costly—deciphering applicants' handwriting in order to enter information into the registration system. 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. Greater accuracy leads to more accurate rolls and decreases the need for provisional ballots, saving time and money, and reduces the time spent assisting voters and processing the ballots.

As Florida's local election officials, wrote in unanimously supporting online voter registration in their state, "Florida taxpayers would save millions each year, eliminate paperwork and greatly reduce the risk of clerical error." They further noted, "those states with existing on-line capabilities found it to be partisan-neutral, in that it does not benefit one political party's registration rate over another's."<sup>1</sup> These anticipated savings are borne out when OVR is implemented. For example, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections (FSASE), Press Release, Florida Elections Officials Push for On-Line Voter Registration (Sep. 23, 2014), *available at* <http://www.myfloridaelections.com/News/Press-Releases>.

Finally, OVR benefits voters and can increase participation. 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. Online voter registration makes sense for the millions of Americans who rely on the Internet to manage their daily affairs.

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, we 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 OVR. If you would like more information please contact Marissa Liebling, Legislative Director for Project Vote at [MLiebling@projectvote.org](mailto:MLiebling@projectvote.org) or (202) 556-5651.

Sincerely,  
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