LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF OHIO

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LWVO Proponent Testimony on
SB 63 – Online Voter Registration
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Chairman Coley, Ranking Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO) on Senate Bill 63.

LWVO is a strong supporter of online voter registration. It is a bi-partisan concept whose time has come. It is more secure, convenient, accurate, and efficient than traditional paper forms.

We urge you to favorably report SB 63, although we do offer one suggestion to improve the process spelled out in the current bill to ensure that ALL eligible voters are able to utilize online registration.

Benefits of Online Voter Registration

Accurate, up-to-date voter registration lists are key to efficient management of the polls and to ensuring that voters are not faced with confusion, long waiting times and excessive numbers of provisional ballots. In nearly every area of American life, individuals are now able to conduct business accurately and quickly online, including buying tickets, banking, paying bills and filing taxes. It is time for election systems to join the 21st century through secure online voter registration.

Many Ohio voters have taken advantage of the online portal on the Secretary of State's website to update their voter registration with a change of address. Extending this option to new registrants can be accomplished with legislation authorizing new registrants to apply online and making provision for capture of the applicant's signature. SB 63 would make this possible and is a positive step forward in modernizing Ohio's elections.

If Ohio continues to wait, we fall behind the rest of the nation.[1] As former Arizona official and Presidential Commission on Election Administration member Tammy Patrick recently noted[2]:

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[1] See http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/upload/sites/OnlineVoterRegistration/OnlineVR_USMap.pdf for a map of the states that permit online voter registration.

[2] "In Focus This Week - First Person Singular: Tammy Patrick", *electiononlineWeekly*, June 4, 2015, available online at http://www.electionline.org/index.php/electionline-weekly

With this last legislative session we now have surpassed the tipping point of more than half the states having authorized online voter registration, more states are participating in the cross-state data sharing programs of ERIC & IVRC, and more jurisdictions are leveraging the efficiencies of the use of electronic pollbooks to manage the moving target of an accurate voter roll.

Yet, there are so many other jurisdictions who yearn to modernize and benefit but are precluded from doing so due to statutory obstacles, lack of political will, deficient resources.

Election administrators are in the proverbial bind of knowing that their registration processes, their voting equipment, is out of date and needs replacement, but more often than not they are not being provided the tools they need to be successful.

Last session, the Legislature took a first step towards modernizing our voter registration rolls by passing Senate Bill 200, which established criteria for electronic voter registration database maintenance. It is time to complete that modernization by expressly authorizing new voters to complete their voter registration form online.

Ohio can also take advantage of learning from the experience of other states that have successfully integrated online registration into their state election administration. The Pew Charitable Trusts has been a leader in gathering research from the states, and they issued a report in January 2014 called "Understanding Online Voter Registration" (available online at http://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2013/UnderstandingOnlineVoterRegistrationpdf.pdf) that summarizes states' experiences to date with online registration:

"Overall, the responses indicate that the registration systems are **cost-effective** for states, convenient for voters, and secure because they **reduce the potential for fraud** while improving the accuracy of voter rolls."

Moving to full online voter registration now is especially timely, during the biennial state budget adoption, because online voter registration is more cost-effective than processing traditional paper forms. According to Secretary Husted, Ohio could have saved $2.8-$13.2 million (based on an estimated savings of $.50-$2.34 per registration) on the 5.6 million voter registrations that were processed in Ohio from 2011-2014.[3]

Suggested Addition to SB 63 as Introduced

Our one suggestion would be to extend the online registration option to ALL voters. The as-introduced version of SB 63 limits online registration to applicants who have a current and valid driver's license or state identification card on file with the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). Roughly 10% of eligible voters do not have a BMV ID, and they would be left out.

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[3] http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/upload/sites/onlinevoterregistration/onlinevoterregistration.aspx?page=20547

While most states that were early adopters of online registration tied it to driver's license records in order to capture a new voter's signature, some states and election experts have been exploring other options to verify a voter's identity and capture a signature.

SB 63 should be amended to allow the Secretary of State to extend online voter registration to ALL voters by allowing for alternate signature capture for the roughly 10% of voters without a BMV ID. This could be done by making the following changes:

- Amend proposed Sec. 3503.20(A)(2)(a)(v) at lines 99-101 to require the applicant to provide their Ohio driver's license number or state ID card number, if they have one. This would more closely mirror the current paper voter registration process that allows applicants to provide either their BMV driver's license or ID number, last four digits of their Social Security Number, or a copy of another form of accepted identification (see R.C. 3503.14(A)(5)).

- Amend proposed Sec. 3503.20(B) at lines 116-123 to retain the current language and process for signature capture of any applicant that has a BMV ID and add language allowing the Secretary of State to promulgate a fallback process to capture signatures for any applicants who do not have a current BMV ID. This would permit the Secretary to implement best practices based on current research and pilots in other states, subject to the standard state rule-making process. If the legislature desires, it could even impose a time period for the Secretary to develop and put in place such a process.

This proposed addition to SB 63 would go a long way toward ensuring that Ohio's online voter registration system does not exclude voters who do not have a current BMV ID. Surely we want to make sure that our "modern" voter registration system is as inclusive as possible and has procedures in place to serve voters such as older individuals who no longer drive, voters who rely on public transportation such as city buses or senior shuttles, voters who have a physical disability that do not drive, newly naturalized citizens that have not yet gotten a driver's license, or military voters who hail from Ohio but may have a driver's license where they are stationed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and we would be happy to answer your questions.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.