



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 23, 2017

Contacts:

Carrie Davis, League of Women Voters of Ohio, 614-469-1505

Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio, (w) 614-441-9145 or (c) 614-579-5509

Voting Rights Advocates Urge Legislature to Include Necessary Elections Funding in State Budget:

Absentee Ballot Applications Mailing, Replacing Aging Voting Machines, and Improving Outdated Campaign Finance Online Reporting System

The Ohio Voting Rights Coalition presented testimony today calling on lawmakers to appropriate necessary funding for Ohio elections.

Advocates urged the legislature to renew funding in the state budget to ensure that every registered voter in Ohio will continue to receive an absentee ballot application mailing ahead of major elections. During every presidential and gubernatorial election since 2012, the Ohio Secretary of State has mailed absentee ballot applications to registered voters throughout the state to offer voters the option of mailing in their ballot. This has helped make elections run more smoothly and reduced long lines at local polling locations.

“Absentee voting has become an increasingly popular option for voters in rural and urban areas alike, and it’s helped financially strapped counties save money by consolidating precincts and reducing Election Day staffing and equipment costs,” said Carrie Davis, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio. “Without adequate funding to continue this mailing, established voting patterns in Ohio will likely be disrupted, resulting in confusion, delays and long lines at the polls.”

More than 1.2 million Ohioans cast an absentee ballot by mail during the 2016 presidential election, nearly double the 665,000 who voted early in-person, according to [official election results](#). Two years ago, legislators overwhelmingly agreed to appropriate \$1.25 million in the previous budget to fund the statewide absentee ballot mailing. Voting advocates urged the legislature to ensure that funding continues in this budget.

Voting advocates also called on state lawmakers to help local election officials update aging voting machines, which “are reaching the end of their operational life,” according to a report by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration.

Camille Wimbish, director of the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition, recommended legislators adopt the same funding structure that was included two years earlier in the last budget to help local elections officials purchase e-pollbooks. That arrangement, where the state pays 85% of the costs and counties cover the remaining 15%, allows for bulk purchasing, which results in a lower price tag for taxpayers and greater confidence that Ohio's elections will be administered smoothly and securely.

"It's time we invest in modernizing our critical infrastructure – our voting infrastructure," Wimbish said, noting that Ohio's voting machines are now more than a decade old. "Most people don't wait a decade to upgrade their phones. Aren't the machines we depend on to choose our country's leaders just as important?"

Catherine Turcer, of Common Cause Ohio, drew attention to the need to update the state's online campaign finance reporting system, which has remained essentially unchanged since the General Assembly passed legislation in 1999 requiring public officials to electronically file information about their campaign contributions.

"Sunlight is the best disinfectant and Ohioans are still able to 'follow the money.' But this important disclosure infrastructure must be upgraded to ensure the public can track campaign contributions and expenditures adequately," Turcer said. "Money plays a significant role in Ohio's elections and Ohio voters should be able to quickly and efficiently access campaign information."