



September 11, 2024

The Honorable Bryan Steil, Chairman
Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6157

Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and members of the US Committee on House Administration, thank you for the opportunity to provide some Ohio perspective on the important work of securing our elections.

I'm sure you've all heard the political proverb that "as Ohio goes, so goes the nation." That adage speaks to my home state's longstanding reputation as a microcosm of the nation. For decades, Ohio has earned the distinction of being a battleground state – where messages are tested, trends are set, and elections are decisive.

Part of the reason for this reputation is that Ohio tends to "get it right." Our unique, decentralized, bipartisan system of oversight is one of the few in the nation that's often called "the gold standard" of election administration. Unlike some states that tend to be high drama on election night or in the days after a national vote, Ohio quietly reports its unofficial results with a high degree of confidence, and then, in the weeks after, we carefully audit those results achieving an accuracy rate of 99.9 percent during my administration.

Ohio didn't earn this distinction without careful and collaborative effort. We created the first-ever, fulltime Election Integrity Unit, becoming one of the first states in the nation to deploy a dedicated investigative team solely focused on election law enforcement, and many states have followed our lead.

As an Army Green Beret, I'm acutely aware that no system is perfect or impenetrable. Security demands vigilance – *and accountability*. We've made Ohio a national model for elections cybersecurity, establishing the nation's first vulnerability disclosure policy for a secretary of state's office and requiring compliance with five landmark security directives, each building on the one before to make Ohio's elections offices the most cyber-secure in America.

I'm the first secretary in the nation to deploy Albert sensors (also called Intrusion Detection Systems) in our election infrastructure statewide. We implemented an endpoint detection and response system, adopting a real-time method of threat

detection. We performed network segmentation, preventing boards of elections from a network breach, even as other government systems have fallen victim to cyberattacks. We hired a fulltime team of cyber liaisons to assist our election offices in evaluating and mitigating vulnerabilities. We required boards to draft written contingency plans for emergencies and to work with their respective county Emergency Management Agencies and sheriffs to review those plans. All of this led to our office receiving the SANS Difference Maker Award for cybersecurity, an industry award given to businesses and organizations that make a “measurable and significant” difference in security.

We worked with our state legislature to create one of the nation’s first state Cyber Reserves modeled after a bill I introduced as a state senator, which gives the Secretary of State a seat on Ohio’s Homeland Security Advisory Council and requires post-election audits by our county election boards to better ensure the accuracy of results. I’m also the first secretary of state in the nation to hire a full-time Chief Information Security Officer.

Beyond infrastructure security, we’ve required unprecedented transparency in Ohio’s elections by publicizing, for the first time ever, the data related to voter list maintenance so private citizens can crowdsource and analyze the data for themselves. During my previous testimony before your subcommittee, I highlighted a legislative priority of my office, a piece of state legislation called the DATA Act. This is landmark legislation designed to address a critical vulnerability in the accountability of our elections.

I’m pleased to inform you that the DATA Act has become law in Ohio, and I’m hopeful other states will follow our lead. Most states currently lack clear requirements for the long-term retention of electronic election data, and federal law requires only the retention of physical ballots for a short period of time after a federal election. This lack of protocol is leading some states to simply erase their electronic data records in the aftermath of a statewide election, creating a crush of requests for public records and making it effectively impossible to conduct long-term audits of results. As you can imagine, this lack of records retention erodes public confidence and leads to corrosive claims of election denial. We can fix this, and Ohio has a solution that works.

The system we’ve created will publicly platform election data into easy-to-digest digital dashboards. The public can then analyze everything from early voting trends and absentee ballot tallies to Election Day demographic data, right down to the number of ballots cast and counted in a particular precinct. Anyone with concerns about ineligible voters or fraudulent votes can examine the results, and my office will provide

comparative analysis between elections by way of a historic digital archive. This open-book transparency is a best practice other states should emulate.

In the Army we have a saying that you “sweat in training so you don’t bleed in battle,” and our election officials done a lot of sweating lately - doing the hard, necessary work to be prepared. Our team planned and hosted “Ready for November” workshops in each region of our state to prepare our bipartisan election officials for the issues they’re likely to encounter – and even some they hopefully won’t. Of course, every election is a massive logistical undertaking that relies on tens of thousands of trained bipartisan poll workers. Our “Ready for November” training series has helped prepare the county election boards by refining and exercising coordination with other government agencies, tabletop exercises to prepare contingency plans, ensuring necessary supplies are ready and improving public communication to both combat false information and empower voters with trusted accurate information.

We’ve made great strides to implement best practices and prepare for this November’s high-profile presidential election, but our elections are only as strong as the confidence our fellow citizens have in them. A recent Marist Poll¹ shows Ohio voters overwhelmingly trust that our elections are both convenient and honest. We have a duty to continuously earn that trust.

Unfortunately, that trust is sometimes jeopardized because of the current administration’s failure to secure the southern border. As a result, many Ohio voters have concerns that noncitizens have found their way onto our voter rolls. The open border policy is an unmitigated disaster for public safety and national sovereignty, but this incompetence has also decreased the public confidence in our elections. Ohioans spoke loud and clear when we enshrined in our state constitution the commonsense value that our elections are only for United States Citizens.

As Secretary of State, I’ve implemented a mandatory citizenship check requirement on each new registration as it’s submitted to our statewide voter registration database, utilizing the federal SAVE database and other data as it becomes available to us. This is why it’s essential that the Biden-Harris administration grant us access to all federal database records necessary for these investigations, which they have yet to do.

¹ https://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Marist-Poll_OH-NOS-and-Tables_202406071439.pdf

Where we've found noncitizens on Ohio's voter rolls, we've taken the necessary steps to remove those ineligible registrations and refer them to the state attorney general for potential prosecution. Contrary to partisan talking points, some noncitizens are indeed registered to vote in this country, and, since my time in office, I've referred more than 1,000 potential noncitizen registration and voting violations to the proper authorities.

I'm taking every step currently possible to ensure that Ohio's voter rolls remain clean, but we've done this with little to no help from the federal government. Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security has been unresponsive to my office's demand for access to federal citizenship verification records. This is exactly why your leadership to pass the federal SAVE Act in the House earlier this summer is a critical step. Please continue to push for its full passage, along with the ACE Act so states can have access to, and authority to act on, additional federal data that allows us to verify the citizenship status of registered voters and secure our elections. Every moment of every day is critical to ensuring a secure, successful election. We urgently need our federal partners to work with, not against, these efforts.

Let me conclude by saying, I've had the opportunity to observe numerous foreign elections, including during my time in uniform. I've witnessed people courageously face threats of violence to cast a vote. They knew, and all of us should remember, what power and efficacy there is at the ballot box. Free men and women choosing their leaders is a remarkable thing and rare in all of human history. It is now our duty as leaders to safeguard that sacred right for our neighbors in the country we love. I'm proud to report to this committee that because of the steps Ohio has taken to increase voter confidence and secure our elections, we're Ready for November – ready to uphold our hard-earned reputation as the gold standard of election administration, and hoping to say once more that "as Ohio goes, so goes the nation."

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State