

OHIO SECRETARY OF STATE FRANK LAROSE
US COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
ELECTIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
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Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Sewell, and members of the House Administration Committee Elections Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share my insights from the 2024 general election and my thoughts on what we can be doing as elected officials and policymakers to ensure that future elections are secure, accessible, and transparent.

**PREPARATION FOR THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL
ELECTION**

For election officials, presidential general elections are considered our “Super Bowl.” Turnout is high, public scrutiny is intense, and the stakes are clear to virtually every American. My office and Ohio’s 88 county boards of elections began preparations more than a year out to ensure we could run a secure and honest election. Throughout 2024, we hosted “Ready for November” training seminars for local officials. We provided new tools and resources to ensure layers of redundant security. Administrative protocols were planned and practiced, and new poll workers were recruited and trained, ensuring the democratic process would not be disrupted. Additionally, the Ohio General Assembly approved a \$1 million public service announcement campaign to educate voters on important election dates and deadlines, inform them of voter ID requirements, and communicate information about the security of Ohio’s elections. Finally, I issued the fifth Security Directive of my administration to the county boards of elections that built upon the previous directives to ensure cyber and physical security measures were implemented across the state and coordinated with the Ohio Association of Election Officials to conduct an informational seminar for members of the General Assembly.

“Sweat in training so you don’t bleed in battle” is a lesson I adopted from my military service. It has become a mantra for our office. We are responsible for a critical mission.

Our elections must be transparent, accurate, secure, and efficient. The results of our tireless preparation for the 2024 election were on full display from the beginning of early voting to the close of polls. Unlike other states that were still counting ballots days and weeks after the election, Ohioans knew the unofficial results shortly after the polls closed. This was accomplished even with 5.8 million Ohioans making their voices heard at the ballot box – the second-highest turnout in our state’s history.

OHIO’S BEST PRACTICES

Ohio has earned a reputation as a “Gold Standard” in election administration because we refuse to rest on our laurels. We are constantly looking for and acting upon process improvements and new ideas to help us ensure it is easy to vote and hard to cheat.

PROMPT REPORTING OF ELECTION RESULTS

Voter confidence in our elections is of national importance. Unlike some states that take days or weeks to report the results of an election, Ohioans know on Election Night who won and who lost. This is because every vote, except for provisional ballots and a few late-arriving absentee ballots, is counted and publicly reported on Election Night.

Ohio law requires bipartisan teams of officials to process—but not tabulate—absentee and early votes ahead of the close of the polls. This gives officials time to verify voters' eligibility and confirm their identification. It also means the first results reported are early and absentee votes. Next, Election Day votes are tabulated locally, proofed by my team, and publicly reported throughout the evening.

To improve voter confidence nationwide, I recommend that states require secure and bipartisan processing of absentee ballots before Election Day.

STANDARDIZED DATA

Ohio has a “bottom-up” system for elections. The state’s 88 county boards of elections, made up of two Republicans, two Democrats, and equal numbers of Republican and Democratic staff, are responsible for administering elections. Because of this, each county used to have differing definitions of common election data terms. For example, “voter registration date” could mean the date a voter registration form was *received* in one county. In contrast, that same term could mean the date an election official *entered* it into the system in another county. Important terms like “ballots cast” and “ballots counted” had similar issues. Without standardized definitions, public data was inconsistent and difficult to verify independently. To address this issue, I worked with the America First

Policy Institute, Secure Elections, the Bipartisan Policy Center, and MIT to craft legislation that codifies definitions and retention of data. It also allowed for the creation of user-friendly data dashboards that enable the public to inspect a multitude of election data points. This law, the DATA Act, has been used as model legislation in other states. I strongly recommend it as a tool for ensuring transparency and accountability in the election space.

PHOTO ID

An American's right to vote must be protected. As chief election officials, we have the solemn duty to ensure that every eligible U.S. citizen can register and cast a ballot for the candidate or issue of their choice. One of the best ways to protect a voter's voice is by requiring a secure government-issued photo ID to vote. Ohio implemented this requirement, which enjoys broad bipartisan support, in 2023. However, even before the law changed, over ninety-eight percent of voters were presenting a photo ID when appearing at that polling location.

Not only does voter ID help guarantee the principle of "one person, one vote," but it also increases voter confidence, in part because it is a tool that can assist with verifying citizenship. Ohio requires driver's licenses and state identification cards to denote when the card holder is not a US citizen. I was sued prior to the presidential general election over my decision to require individuals who present an ID stating they are a noncitizen to provide additional documentation verifying their naturalization. However, the courts have upheld this commonsense practice.

FEDERAL ACTION

The U.S. Constitution empowers the states to run elections. However, the federal government also has an obligation to assist states by providing the necessary tools to ensure accurate voter registration rolls and the delivery of absentee ballots.

FEDERAL CITIZENSHIP DATA

Only American citizens are permitted to participate in American elections. The Ohio voters enshrined this commonsense notion into our constitution in 2022. As secretary of state, I have conducted the most thorough citizenship review of Ohio's voter rolls in our state's history. We utilize state Bureau of Motor Vehicles data, Social Security Administration data, and the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) system to do this. However, the Biden administration refused to provide my office with critical citizenship

data housed at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which clearly violates the law.

Last year, my office filed a lawsuit against DHS. That lawsuit is ongoing, but I hope that with the new administration states will soon be able to proactively verify the citizenship status of every registered voter on their rolls. Congress can assist the states with this effort by requiring federal agencies to make citizenship data available for this purpose, ideally at no cost to the state.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE (USPS) OVERSIGHT

In recent years, USPS has attempted to improve the delivery of election mail. However, further action is needed to ensure voters can confidently use the postal service to request and return their ballots. During the 2024 election season, my office regularly communicated with USPS regional sort facilities that handle Ohio mail. A September memo from the National Association of Secretaries of State addressed to then-Postmaster General Louis DeJoy outlines many of the issues that I and other Secretaries of State would like to see addressed. These items include inconsistent training for USPS staff, exceptionally long delivery times, and mail incorrectly returned as undeliverable. Absentee voting is a convenient option for many Americans. However, improvements must be made to ensure voters are not unintentionally disenfranchised due to government delays or ineptitude.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on the 2024 election, share the best practices Ohio has developed and successfully implemented, and highlight areas in which the federal government can best support election administration. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State