



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Interested Party Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee on Senate Bill 135

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The Buckeye Institute**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about an issue critical to all Ohioans—strengthening our democratic infrastructure.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am the research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

Senate Bill 135 includes funding to replace Ohio’s aging voting machines—a wise use of state dollars that serves a core government function. Democratic elections represent the key mechanism by which citizens choose their leaders and hold them accountable. Thus, they undergird the very foundation of our democracy. To maintain the integrity of the election process is to maintain the integrity of our democratic infrastructure. And as we explained in our recent report, *Principled Spending: Using Ohio’s Capital Budget to Benefit Ohioans*, funding Ohio’s democratic infrastructure ultimately helps to maintain the integrity of our state.¹

President Ronald Reagan once said, “Every American must know he or she can count on an equal chance and an equal vote.”² Counting on that equal chance requires counting every vote—with voting machines. In today’s democratic process, voting machines are a key piece of infrastructure on which our elections depend. Unfortunately, many of Ohio’s county boards of elections still rely on voting machines purchased more than a decade ago with funds from the federal Help America Vote Act.³ These machines are in desperate need of replacement.

The Buckeye Institute supports using state funds for new voting machines, but as I mentioned to this Committee last week, the capital budget—and not a separate funding bill—is the more appropriate legislative vehicle for funding state infrastructure and core government responsibilities. Funding for voting machines should have been included in the capital budget, and to the extent that a separate mechanism, such as S.B. 135, is used instead, then the capital budget should be off-set by the corresponding amount in order to maintain longer-term spending balance.

Finding cost off-sets in the capital budget to pay for upgrading voting machines is not difficult. Many of the line items listed in our Top 10 Worst Capital Budget Requests of 2018⁴ could be cut or eliminated to pay for replacing our outdated voting machines, including \$4 million for a Cincinnati soccer stadium, \$5 million for retail and restaurant space at COSI in Columbus, and \$400,000 on ill-advised, government-owned broadband networks throughout the state. Reducing state funding for locally-focused projects would make it easier to afford new election machines and other infrastructure needs such as sewers and wastewater treatment facilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to answering any questions that the Committee may have.

¹ Greg R. Lawson and Quinn Beeson, *Principled Spending: Using Ohio’s Capital Budget to Benefit Ohioans*, The Buckeye Institute, February 5, 2018.

² President Ronald Reagan, *Statement About the Extension of the Voting Rights Act*, November 6, 1981.

³ **Husted Calls for Replacement of Ohio’s Aging Voting Equipment**, Ohio Secretary of State Office press release, December 14, 2017.

⁴ **More Than \$18 Million Spent on The Buckeye Institute’s Top 10 List of Worst Capital Budget Requests**, The Buckeye Institute press release, March 5, 2018.

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