

TESTIMONY FROM OHIO SECRETARY OF STATE FRANK LAROSE for the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee:

Thank you, Chairman Kail and members of the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee for the invitation to speak with you today. It's good to be back. I sincerely believe the path forward to strengthen this country is here at the state level – sharing ideas and learning from each other as 50 laboratories of democracy. The last time I had the opportunity to speak with Pennsylvania's elected representatives, we talked about important procedures we in Ohio have in place which allow our state to swiftly count ballots on election night and other efforts that have made Ohio a national model for election administration. Simply put, we make it both easy to vote and hard to cheat. I hope we can continue our dialogue and inspire other states to look our way in our efforts to boost both the integrity and accessibility of our election system.

Ohio became a national model because we've had a relentless drive to innovate, modernize, and improve. For decades, Ohio has served as the epicenter of presidential politics – As Ohio Goes, So Goes the Nation has long been a part of the American political lexicon. That intense focus on our elections required Ohio to get it right because the world is watching. As a result, we've continuously improved the logistics, security, and convenience of our elections to deliver both a good voter experience and elections that Ohioans can trust – even when their favorite candidate loses.

What makes elections work -- what makes our democratic republic work more than anything else is the confidence voters have in our elections. Without that confidence, there is no "consent of the governed", as prescribed by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Without that confidence, there is no democratic republic.

So where does that confidence stand right now?

A poll conducted after the 2022 election by Pew Research Center showed nearly 1 in 3 voters aren't confident in their elections. That's not just Republican voters – it's ALL voters. Just four years ago, it was less than 1 in 5. Voter confidence is getting worse, and it's getting worse fast.

In Ohio, we're working aggressively to turn these concerns around. We've worked with community leaders to conduct seminars that educate them about misinformation and disinformation and how to respond to it. We invited news media to tour our county boards of elections and learn more about the efforts made to keep our elections secure and accessible. We built out a full rapid-response team that has been recognized in the New York Times for its efforts to fight back against misinformation and disinformation around election season. Most recently, we launched a brand-new Public Integrity Division whose mission is to address allegations of voter fraud & suppression, among other tasks designed to strengthen the confidence of voters in our elections.

Because we're never one to rest on our laurels, we worked to find other ways to boost voter confidence, and there was an easy change with big support that could go a long way towards getting the job done. Continuing our efforts to focus on the concerns of voters, we have seen overwhelming approval for voter photo ID requirements. Pew Research Center shows 76 percent support it nationally. That number is 80 percent according to Monmouth University, and NPR shows 79 percent want photo ID requirements. From my understanding, Pennsylvania polling shows very similar levels of support for this improvement.

With my support, Ohio leaders in our General Assembly took action. Last month, they passed legislation requiring photo identification to vote, and they did it the right way. In order to ensure no one will be left out, they are making state-issued photo identification available for free. Additionally, exceptions were made for religious reasons, and no additional identification requirements were made for our successful and secure vote-by-mail system.

Because of the way the law is structured, it won't prevent individuals from voting. Instead, it simply ensures that only eligible citizens are able to do so. This is a fair and reasonable measure to maintain the integrity of our elections, and to build confidence in the election process.

Will this change impact the voting experience for a lot of Ohio voters? The answer is no. According to a sampling of our county boards of elections, about 98 percent of Ohioans were already using either their driver license or state-issued photo ID card to vote in the 2022 election, and that's consistent with other previous elections.

Government works best when we work together on common-sense solutions with strong support from the people. That happened in Ohio, and it can happen here in Pennsylvania.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.