



Chairman Grove and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

The tenth amendment of the United States Constitution states that "all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States". That is why states are so often called the laboratories of democracy. We, the states, make it happen. We know our constituents, and we work together -- like we are today -- to make our respective states a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

In Ohio, our elections have been under the microscope for a long time. I'm sure you've heard the term, "As goes Ohio, so goes the nation...". It isn't just some made-up meaningless phrase -- it comes from Ohio's long history of being the focal point of presidential elections. In fact, up until this last election, the last time Ohio voted opposite of the final result was 1960. That is sixty years of being in the national spotlight. Perhaps the spotlight has never been brighter than in the past two decades since 2000. What has that gotten us? The best-run elections in the nation. After all, when you are in that national spotlight you must hone your craft, innovate, and develop a system that works for the voters of your state.

Under the most challenging environment to host an election in our state's history, our system shined in 2020. And most importantly, Ohio voters had confidence in the result of our election.

One big part of our success came thanks to our intensive focus on election security. In June of 2019, we issued a comprehensive, multi-faceted security strategy for local boards of elections that provided the redundancy required of a strong election system infrastructure. This security directive made Ohio the national leader in election security and was comprised of 34 separate requirements, including physical security, cybersecurity, background checks, and training.

We built on that effort in 2020 with our 'Election Security & Accessibility Directive', detailing how counties must use federal dollars to strengthen their election security and accessibility preparation for the upcoming election. We also made it a point to directly push the vast majority of federal dollars straight to the county boards of elections, with only a fraction being used in our office to boost voter participation.

Other efforts this past year focused on health and safety improvements, innovative poll worker recruitment, improvements to our absentee ballots, and much more.

And what was the result of that election?

- Nearly six million Ohioans voted.
- There was a 74 percent turnout rate.
- 59 percent of ballots were cast early.
- 94 percent of absentee ballots were returned.
- Only 0.42 percent of absentee ballots were rejected as invalid.
- All-time lows in provisional ballots.
- 56,000 poll workers, many of them new to the job.

Every single one of those statistics is a state record. Ohio had higher turnout than ever. Ohio had more accessibility than ever. And Ohio had stronger security than ever. In the most challenging environment, Ohio ran our most successful election in history by any quantifiable standard.

This doesn't happen by accident. This happens when a strong election system is built over time, complete with processes and procedures that protect the integrity and security of the vote, and works in partnership with dedicated bipartisan election officials to provide our citizens with unprecedented access and opportunity to make their voice heard.

Voter confidence is essential in our elections and there is nothing more important to providing confidence in our system than requiring bipartisan teams at county boards of elections. In Ohio, we structure each county board with two members from each party, as well as a Director & Deputy Director from opposite parties. This partnership provides greater election security on a daily basis, from ballot storage room locks requiring two separate keys at the same time to vital, bipartisan decisions and rules that keep our elections fair and secure.

A bipartisan team of election officials cannot maintain voter confidence alone, as they need processes in place that prove to voters that the job of counting ballots is not only done fairly but efficiently and without room for error. In Ohio we allow boards to process absentee ballots prior to election day with bipartisan teams overseeing every part of the process. This practice can begin once early voting begins and doesn't officially count the ballots, but processes them so that after Election Day ends, boards

can tabulate absentee and early ballots with the push of a button. Voters continue to have confidence in a system in which they see their voice reflected on election night versus days or weeks later. This also relieves a little bit of stress on boards to count quickly, though their goal is to put accuracy above all else.

With the significant increase in absentee ballots last year, we knew the potential for misinformation and disinformation was high. In Ohio, absentee ballots are allowed to be counted if they arrive within the 10-day post-election window, provided they are postmarked by the day before the election, and many do. To better prepare voters for the high numbers of outstanding ballots in the final unofficial results, we highlighted that count on our election results website available to all voters on election night and the forthcoming days. By doing so, we avoided surprises or accusations of impropriety that other states were subject to in the weeks following the election.

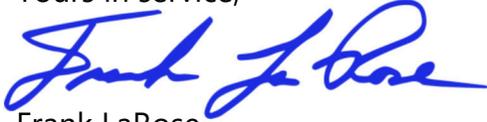
Essential to maintaining voter confidence is secure and accurate voter rolls. In Ohio, voter registration is managed by our 88 county boards of elections. Federal and state requirements for regular voter list maintenance help keep the registration system secure by adding another layer of checks to prevent fraud. Abandoned registrations can clog up voter registration rolls and make it easier for the bad guys to manipulate, so we work with our boards to remove registrations that haven't had any voter activity for at least six years, or 12 elections. But with 88 county boards of elections using 88 different processes and different vendors, there is certainly the potential for error. That's why before any cancellations take place, we instituted an innovative new process of sharing the identified abandoned registrations list with the public. This essentially allows for crowdsourcing with both organizations and media to improve accuracy, as well as reach out to any registrations to determine if they want to remain active.

Ohio is keeping our elections secure, accessible, and accurate. But that doesn't mean we've perfected our system. After all, election administration must always work to innovate and improve both security and accessibility. One priority of mine has been a more modernized voter registration system – one that utilizes existing technology and partners with state agencies that have high contact with registered voters. By providing a more automated system that has a high propensity for contact with voters, we'll be able to do a better job of keeping voter rolls accurate.

I'm proud of our team at the Ohio Secretary of State's office. We've worked hard to earn the confidence of Ohioans, and I feel we've been successful. I wish the same for you in our neighboring state.

Thank you, Chairman and members of the committee, for asking me to testify about how Ohio's success can help our neighbors in Pennsylvania. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank LaRose". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State