



**Michael Stinziano**  
**State Representative**

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*Testimony of State Representative Michael Stinziano of Columbus  
Before The Presidential Commission on Election Administration  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Co-Chairman Robert Bauer, Co-Chairman Benjamin Ginsberg and members of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, thank you for the opportunity to give testimony before this body.

My name is State Representative Michael Stinziano and I represent Ohio's 18<sup>th</sup> House District which includes great neighborhoods in the cities of Columbus, Bexley and Grandview Heights, Ohio.

Let me also thank you for your important work on enhancing the experience of voters. As the former director of the Franklin County Board of Elections, the second largest voting jurisdiction in the great state of Ohio, I applaud you for working to identify best practices in elections administration. Along with my service in Franklin County, I am an ongoing member of The Election Center and CERA certified, so I know the collaborative election administrative improvement efforts underway not only in Ohio but across the country.

We need to do all we can to make our elections free, fair, open and honest so that all qualified citizens can exercise their right to vote.

***Increasing Voter Participation***

In a representative democracy, we want as many eligible voters to come out and express their point of view because it's the right thing to do.

Democracies work best when everyone participates.

As I mentioned, I'm the former director of the Franklin County Board of Elections, the elections administration agency in the county in which Ohio's capital is located. In this role, I was privileged to work with a great bipartisan team to run the general presidential election of 2008.

And you know what? We ran a great election that at the time had been highest turnout election in the county ever. Our early voting efforts broke participation records, polling locations closed on time and controversy and long lines did not plague our efforts.

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## ***Success of Early Voting Options and Opportunities***

One of the most impactful changes implemented throughout Ohio has been the increase in early voting opportunities for eligible voters. Having learned valuable lessons from previous elections in 2000 and 2004, the Ohio General Assembly added early voting days and access to voting at the convenience of the elector. This approach has been a true success for participation and perception that election administration can be responsive to the needs of the voter.

Franklin County in both the 2008 and 2012 elections have lead the way for early voting practices and procedures.

Early voting opportunities have and must include both paper and in-person opportunities that have been shown to be responsive to the needs of diverse and unique electors. Ideally, a mailing of an absentee application to all registered voters is an appropriate means by which to introduce this option to voters.

Providing a routine and consistent standard for early voting opportunities is needed going forward. By routine and consistent I don't feel simply relying on the rhetoric of uniformity is appropriate. The ongoing fetish with uniformity is simply misplaced. Just as all politics are local, so are elections. In Ohio for example, each county and election jurisdiction is very unique and relying on the local control that is available is most appropriate to learn and apply the needs for those unique electors.

I understand this creates challenges but with modern technology there is no reason not to improve election administration throughout the Country with such a tenant in mind.

## ***Online Voter Registration – Safe, Secure and Convenient***

To help as many qualified voters participate in our elections as possible, online voter registration is gaining traction.

I've sponsored a bill in the Ohio House of Representatives (HB 78) that would allow eligible voters to securely and safely register online. My proposal is pending in the House Policy and Legislative Oversight Committee.

I firmly believe that this one important change would do a lot to make our elections more efficient and would encourage more people to register to vote and hopefully participate in our democratic system.

As you know, online voter registration has been catching on around the nation.

According to the respected and nonpartisan National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), as of August 2013, a total of 12 states offer online registration while another six states have passed legislation but have not yet set up their systems. (Link: <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx>)

Also, four additional states offer a limited online voter registration system.

According to NCSL, Arizona pioneered online voter registration in 2002 and the latest statistics suggest that seven in 10 of all voter registrations there are done online.

According to press accounts, the state also reported an increased accuracy in the voter rolls as well as significant cost savings.

Simply put, it's beyond time we use modern technology to enhance our voting system where it can be done in a safe, verifiable and secure way Think about it: In our rapidly changing world, people right now can do everything from banking, paying their taxes to interacting with their government officials online. It only makes sense that eligible voters be able to register online in a safe and secure manner.

There are other added benefits to an online voter registration system: Information submitted directly by the voter is less likely to be inaccurate and the information can more easily be verified or cross-checked against other government databases.

Ohio state government already allows registered voters to update their addresses online.

As *The Columbus Dispatch* newspaper put it recently in an editorial supporting my idea: 'it's past time for lawmakers to allow the next logical step: online registration ... "

### ***Identification Requirements for Voters***

Discussion of online registration in Ohio has turned to additional and distracting discussion about identification requirements in order to cast a ballot.

Where confusion lies is why such a proposition is needed when current identification requirements (of the eight forms of identification currently provided for in Ohio law) are applied.

In my research on photo ID I have yet to hear one demonstrable state interest that is not met under Ohio's current identification law.

One interesting aspect of being an election official is to hear the many rumors of voter fraud and disenfranchisement that are raised. When I served as Director, I got calls from as far away as California and my favorite, from Chicago, telling me about what they saw on the news or read on a blog about the illegal votes being cast in Ohio and in particular Franklin County. Simply stated, as long as there is money to be made in creating fear, it will occur with elections. In addition, there will always be folks who witnessed a voter illegally obtain a ballot through some sort of illegal means. However, those folks are never actually identified, stories never verified and the legend of their tale is unfortunately given instant credibility.

Having procedures and processes in place from the act of registering to vote, to casting a ballot that are meant to and actually do catch those trying either intentionally or unintentionally to commit fraud need to be highlighted further. I applaud jurisdictions, such as those in Ohio that provide for a bi-partisan team of election officials, interested parties and elected officials in place to address these stories and to

investigate and verify if such issues have arisen. Without such standards, Ohio's reputation and election administration integrity across the country is weakened.

As we hear consistently, there is no definitive, undeniable proof of voter fraud. I agree voter fraud by its very nature is illusive and difficult to prove and to some extent depending on the allegation so is voter disenfranchisement.

Photo identification laws like those proposed in Ohio and in other states does nothing that the current law doesn't already do except limit options for voters. Options exist to provide voters a number of means by which they can exercise their democratic right to vote. Anyone who votes on Election Day will be still asked to sign the poll book, next to their registered address, next to a copy of their signature.

How we have ID requirement that allows many more voters to participate compared to other states and also say we need to continue to find solutions to limit provisional voters while not preventing participation (i.e. in Indiana folks don't vote provisional because their law doesn't allow it).

### ***Conclusion***

Having had the chance to serve on the front line of Ohio's election administration, I know voters and administrators are resilient. As much as things change, they also remain the same. We most certainly can and should do better in a number of areas.

Thank you to the co-chairs and members of the committee for allowing me to provide this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at your convenience.