



October 14, 2009

The Honorable Dan Stewart
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 12th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

The Honorable Tracy Heard
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 14th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Re: House Bill 260

Dear Representative Stewart and Heard:

House Bill 260 proposes a broad range of changes to Ohio's electoral process. As statewide education organizations, the Ohio School Boards Association, Buckeye Association of School Administrators, Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers and Ohio Association of School Business Officials encourage this effort to make Ohio's elections as effective as possible. **However, our organizations strongly oppose the recommendation in House Bill 260 to eliminate special elections in February and August.** This provision will undermine the ability of school districts to raise critical funding support from local communities needed to help implement education reforms, strengthen curriculum offerings, provide extracurricular activities, and build new school facilities.

The proposal to eliminate special elections in February and August not only alters election law, but also will negatively impact Ohio's school funding system by creating costly delays in the passage of school levies. Current law allows school districts to place levies on the ballot up to three times a calendar year. By reducing special election opportunities from four to two in a non-presidential election year, and from three to two in a presidential election year, this proposal effectively reduces the frequency a school district can go to the ballot from three to two times a calendar year. In addition, the reduction in special elections will restrict a school district's flexibility as to the timing of placing a levy on the ballot.

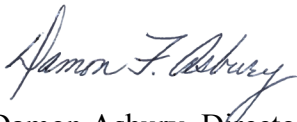
These changes are significant because, on average, it takes three election attempts to build the awareness and support needed to pass a school levy. In fact, between 2005 and 2009 nearly a quarter of all efforts to pass a new operating levy took at least four attempts. While it is our collective objective to reduce these numbers, the statistics strongly indicate that limiting special elections to two times a year will result in the delay of millions of dollars in critical local funding that many school districts need to maintain important education services and implement the education reforms envisioned in House Bill 1 and in the No Child Left Behind Act. An issue carried over to the next calendar year means a delay in the collection of the new revenue until the FOLLOWING calendar year. Further, with fewer issues typically on the ballot in February and August, districts will be deprived of the unique opportunity to run a focused campaign and attract voter attention to the merits of their ballot issue.

The estimated cost savings derived from reducing the frequency of special elections will be far outweighed by the financial costs to school districts caused by reducing opportunities to raise local revenue. It is projected that this measure will lower the cost of administering elections by approximately \$2.7 to \$5.4 million dollars a year statewide. However, this proposal will likely delay or risk tens of millions of dollars a year in revenue that school districts need to provide high-quality education services. In fact, if they choose to put a levy on the ballot, school districts themselves are required to pay for the vast majority of election costs, which represents an investment by the district in securing critical revenue. The discretion for decisions like these should be left to the local district board of education. They need the tools necessary to properly fund the educational opportunities in their own districts, and the ability to analyze the cost/benefit to using a special election.

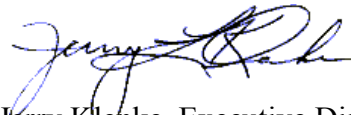
When put in the context of Ohio's struggling economy and the challenges it presents to the state's ability to fund schools, a proposal that will make it more difficult for schools to obtain alternative funding sources needed to deliver key education services is counterproductive and imprudent. Ultimately, the additional fiscal stress this will place on many school districts may lead to harmful reductions in programs and services important to students and their families.

Seeking constructive efficiencies in government is always important, but the total effect and unintended consequences of any cost saving measure should always be considered. While our organizations were not a part of the two election reform summits leading to House Bill 260, many of the recommendations in the bill appear to fulfill the worthy objective of improving Ohio's electoral process. However, the proposal to eliminate special elections in February and August will not enhance Ohio's election system. Rather, it will unnecessarily undermine the ability of public schools to deliver a high-quality education. We urge the House Elections and Ethics Committee to remove this harmful provision from the bill.

Sincerely,



Damon Asbury, Director of Legislative Services
Ohio School Boards Association



Jerry Klenke, Executive Director
Buckeye Association of School Administrators



Patricia Frost-Brooks, President
Ohio Education Association



Sue Taylor, President
Ohio Federation of Teachers

Barbara Shaner, Associate Executive Director
Ohio Association of School Business Officials

CC: Ted Strickland, Governor of Ohio
Jennifer Brunner, Ohio Secretary of State
House Majority and Minority Leaders
All Members, House Ethics and Elections Committee
HB 260 Co-sponsors