AN EXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCE

Responding to Challenges Facing Ohio's Election Workforce

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Executive Summary

Every election, across 88 counties, Ohio's dedicated election administrators sprint to make sure every vote counts and is counted accurately. Today, these professionals are straining under the weight of back-to-back statewide special elections and rhetorical attacks on their trustworthiness, character, and patriotism. Simultaneously over the years, their workload is becoming more complex as the number of cybersecurity and public relations components grows. Changes to voting laws have added to the problem, causing public confusion as boards of election (BOEs)—typically understaffed, underpaid, and underfunded—implement the required changes. Meanwhile, the specter of political violence haunts the upcoming 2024 presidential election.

The less county governments and the state invest in Ohio's election workforce, the more likely mistakes become. In today's highly charged political environment, those mistakes could be costlier to public trust than ever.

There is a political element to elections by their nature, but recent trends toward the politicization of election *administration* are a matter of public concern. Debates about this trend usually occur between advocates for stricter guardrails against election fraud and advocates for greater access to the ballot. The voices of election administrators are heard less frequently.

This report draws on interviews with 20 of Ohio's 88 counties and five other relevant professionals to illustrate how near Ohio's election workforce is to breaking, through no fault of their own, and how that outcome can be prevented. As an educational resource for policymakers, nonprofits, and other stakeholders, it provides an overview of Ohio's elections process, observations on current trends and challenges in the election administration, and recommendations for improving the bedrock process of democracy in the Buckeye State.

Key Findings:

- Turnover among election workers has accelerated at an alarming rate, leaving an increasing number of counties with staff who have never worked a presidential election before to fill the void as experienced election workers leave.

- Election workers are coping with the challenges they face through the support of peers and the Ohio Association of Election Officials, but this is not enough and should not have to be.

- New duties, including cybersecurity and public communications, have made election administration a more demanding job than in the past—but government pay scales and public perception of the workload have not kept up.

- Allegations of election fraud have damaged public trust in elections administration and the morale of election workers who face regular accusations about their trustworthiness.

- Few Ohio election officials reported threats of violence, but the growing sense of hostility and distrust is palpable.

- Hastily drafted legislation and vague directives from the secretary of state leave election officials scrambling for operational clarity and to inform the public about how to exercise the right to vote.

- Few election administrators interviewed for this report have the bandwidth to think about the risks or potential benefits of new technologies that could pose a threat to elections or support their work, like generative artificial intelligence.

To improve the administration of the 2024 election:

- Legislators and county and state government officials should work with county BOEs to create emergency mitigation and response plans, including crisis communications. Advocates should also push for this coordination.

- State and county governments should expand resources and programs for public engagement, which is essential for combatting election dis- and misinformation and for informing the public about changes to voting processes.

- State legislators and the Ohio secretary of state should create and enhance statewide support mechanisms for boards with new staff or other acute needs.

- Advocates and local officials should promote community-based programs to de-escalate confrontation at the polls.

- Advocates, the Ohio secretary of state, and the Ohio Association of Election Officials should identify and resolve cross-county trends in provisional ballot rejection.

- The Ohio secretary of state should consult more closely with election administrators while implementing the DATA Act.

Furthermore, since the work does not end in 2024, to improve the capacity for public servants to administer future elections, county and state government should do the following:

- Consolidate the elections calendar, keeping the commitment the legislature made to end the use of August special elections and reducing the number of elections more generally.
- Repeal, clarify, or narrow section 3501.054 of the Ohio Revised Code, the "Collaboration Ban," so community groups can do more to help.
- Create statewide standards for boards of elections' budget and compensation, helping them recruit and retain qualified staff.
- Improve the absentee voting and voter registration processes, and join 42 other states in making voter registration available online and 19 other states which allow for online requests of absentee ballots.
- Reduce early voting congestion and mail-in voting delays by allowing counties to decide whether or not to operate a second ballot dropbox and a second early vote location, with appropriate security precautions.
- Carefully experiment with pilot programs using new technologies to streamline elections administration.
- Create programs to educate elected officials about the election process, in order to inform both their rhetoric and legislative proposals.
- Close schools on election day so they can reliably and safely serve as polling places.
- Expand and improve on programs to recruit poll workers, a large and aging component of Ohio's election workforce.

Election administration is a crucial point of failure for democracy and government in Ohio and the nation writ large. It is the foundation on which everything else stands. But it is cracking, and it cannot be repaired through security measures alone. Its sustainability requires increased resources and attention at all levels of government. Effort and expenditure now will pay dividends in higher public trust, a more sustainable workforce, and greater administrative efficiency. It is not too late to invest in democracy.

Introduction

Ohio should be proud of its election system. Elections do not run smoothly on their own; they are complicated logistical operations requiring skill and experience. Across Ohio's 88 counties, dedicated professionals sprint to make sure every vote counts and is counted accurately. They meet this challenge with the help of a well-regarded professional association (the Ohio Association of Election Officials, or OAEO); a nationally recognized, state-specific certification program run by The Ohio State University (OSU); and rich networks of peer support.

Despite these advantages, this important asset is at alarming risk. The recent frequency of special elections has exhausted the workforce, many members of which have not taken a vacation in years. They spend long nights and weekends away from their families to meet deadlines which are increasingly unpredictable. Their ironic reward for this hard work is scrutiny, scorn, and sometimes threats from members of the public—and occasionally elected officials—who question their trustworthiness when they do not like election results. Despite the long hours, many officials say this hostile sentiment is the bigger challenge to their morale.
Election administration has also grown more complicated in recent years as new cybersecurity requirements and other policies have added layers of complexity. More professionals leave the field every year, either for less-stressful jobs in public service

“Many people take it for granted that our democracy will carry on forever, but in truth, our democracy is only as good as the people who administer and participate in it.”

Aaron Ockerman, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Election Officials, in an interview with OSU’s John Glenn College of Public Affairs

or higher-paying jobs in the private sector, where their organizational skills, leadership potential, and work ethic are prized. Others retire, eager to put the work behind them.

There is a political element to elections by their nature, but recent trends toward the politicization of election *administration* are a matter of public concern. Debates about this trend usually occur between advocates for stricter guardrails against election fraud and advocates for greater access to the ballot. The voices of election administrators are heard less frequently.

This report is meant to serve as an educational resource for policymakers, nonprofits, and other stakeholders trying to understand the pressures and needs of Ohio’s elections workforce as the 2024 presidential election approaches. It provides an overview of Ohio’s elections process, observations on current trends and challenges in the elections space, and recommendations for improving the bedrock process of democracy in the Buckeye State.

Figure 1

Counties represented in this sample:

Allen
Ashland
Clermont
Defiance
Greene
Hamilton
Lorain
Lucas
Miami
Montgomery
Preble
Warren
Washington

Additionally, seven counties agreed to speak anonymously and are not identified here.

Methodology

The findings and recommendations presented here draw on 29 interviews conducted between January and April 2024. These included:

- Nineteen interviews with either the director or deputy director of county boards of elections (BOEs).[1]
- One interview with a public affairs professional at a county BOE.
- One interview with a retired BOE director.
- Three interviews with BOE members.
- And five interviews with relevant professionals in other sectors.

Interview participants were offered the choice to be on or off the record and, if on the record, to be quoted by name or anonymously (if at all).

[1] One of these interviews included both the director and deputy director; it is counted as a single interview. Three BOEs agreed to share answers in writing rather than by phone or video call.

Every county BOE in Ohio was contacted at least once—and often more than once—in an attempt to gather their input for this report. Some declined to schedule an interview due to the demands of organizing the March 2024 primary election. Others did not respond at all.

This interview sample represents the state regionally and demographically. The smallest counties in the sample have populations of less than 40,000 people; the largest include two of Ohio's most populous cities. It includes counties from central Ohio as well as the state's Northeastern, Northwestern, Southwestern, and Southeastern regions. Based on self-identification during interviews and voter registration records, we can also confirm that the sample includes both registered Republicans and Democrats.

Trends in **Election Administration**

Much of the research and advocacy related to election administration in 2024 focuses on nationwide trends. Comparatively little has focused on Ohio specifically. As a starting point, this report looks to nationwide trends before exploring the situation on the ground across Ohio.

The election administrators interviewed for this study were adamant that every county is distinct and, so, many decisions should be left up to local authorities. However, they also experience many shared challenges. For instance, the rise of election denial since 2020 has led many election administrators to spend more of their time and resources on public communications and education than in the past. Likewise, recent changes in voting laws mean there is more need to communicate new procedures and rules to the electorate. In Ohio, this challenge is made more difficult by an ambiguous statewide ban on "collaboration" between BOEs and nongovernment partners.

A consequence of these trends is the high rate of turnover among election officials nationwide. This is an old trend that seems to be accelerating: According to an April 2024 report from the Bipartisan Policy Center, "election official turnover has been increasing steadily" since at least 2004, and it "might be rising more today." In many states, a contributing factor is the rising rate of harassment and threats that officials face from members of the public who question their integrity and the results of recent elections.

Beyond these changes, election officials also deal with the more routine aspects of their work. These include recruiting and training poll workers, meeting newly strengthened cybersecurity requirements, locating space for polling places and storage of files and equipment, securing adequate funding, and other basic elements of the electoral process. Many of these, too, have become more difficult in recent years: Managing technology vendors, for example, is a new element of the job and has made it more complex.

The sections below summarize how Ohio's elections workforce is dealing with these trends. This report concludes with recommendations for how stakeholders—especially government at the county and state levels—can ease the strain on one of Ohio's most important civic resources.

Ohio's elections workforce is buckling under the weight of growing demands.

Staff exhaustion was the top concern raised by interview participants. Put simply, Ohio's elections workforce is tired. A primary contributing factor is the unusually high frequency of elections in recent years, owing especially to the unanticipated August special election in 2023. Election administrators were quick to note they have run ten major elections in three years, coming off of the election-related challenges in 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This has put them under physical and mental strain. One BOE director said they could not "emphasize enough how disruptive" it was to have two unscheduled August special elections in a row.[2] As shown in Figure 2, it takes about 120 days to fully plan and execute an election in Ohio, from candidate filings to final reporting requirements. When there are three statewide elections in one year, it means officials are never not sprinting.

This gives them little time for any kind of proactive work, to say nothing of rest and recovery. Many have canceled family vacations for multiple years in a row and are afraid to even plan one in 2024. They routinely work nights, weekends, and holidays; one reflected that they could not count how many Mother's Days they had worked. Some have hit their cap on vacation hours. LaVera Scott, director of the Lucas County BOE, said in an interview that she encourages her staff to look at calendars well in advance so they can plan to get adequate rest; but when asked when she herself last took a vacation, she laughed and said, "that doesn't apply to me … in a crunch, it has to be me or my deputy."

Paul Adams, Director of the Lorain County BOE, said that he recalls that before the late 2000s, Ohio allowed both August and February special elections, typically for small portions and districts within a county, but he said that the recent, countywide specials require more staff to work more precincts, making them more strenuous than special elections held in decades past.

[2] The first of these, in August 2022, was originally scheduled for May but postponed after the Ohio Supreme Court rejected the maps approved by the state redistricting commission. At the end of that year, the Ohio General Assembly outlawed future August special elections, only to reinstate them in order to put a constitutional amendment related to ballot initiatives to a popular vote before the 2023 November general election.

How long does it take to run an election in Ohio?

There is a common misconception about boards of election that must be cleared up at the outset: They do much more than operate on the handful of election days each year. While this may sound obvious, several interview participants reported hearing variations of this claim. One even found themselves explaining to a mortgage lender that, yes, running the BOE office is a full-time job.

Less obvious is that each election represents more than 100 days of work and planning. In interviews, participants from county BOEs worried that legislators do not understand the amount of planning and effort required for this essential function of democracy.

Figure 2 summarizes some of the deadlines election officials must meet every time voters go to the polls.[3]

Figure 2

Requirement	**Deadline**
BOEs must publish notices of election and provide the notices to federal write-in absentee voters upon request.	**No later than 100 days before election**
Declarations of candidacy must be filed. Local questions for primary ballot must be certified. Applications for absentee ballots may be accepted.	**90 days before election**
BOEs must certify validity of petitions to appear on the ballot.	**78 days before election**
Form of ballots must be certified.	**70 days before election**
BOEs must schedule training for precinct election officials.	**60 days before election**
Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting (UOCAVA) ballots must be ready.	**46 days before election**
Deadline for voter registration; early voting begins next day.	**30 days before election**
BOEs prepare precinct voter registration lists.	**14 days before election**
Mail-in ballot applications must be received by BOEs.	**7 days before election**
Election Day	**Election Day**
Mail-in ballots must be returned to BOE.	**4 days after election**
BOEs must begin official canvass of election ballots.	**5-15 days after election**

[3] A more complete but denser and more complicated calendar of major election deadlines in 2024 is available from the secretary of state. See "2024 Ohio Elections Calendar," Office of the Ohio Secretary of State. Accessed 3/19/2024.

Many interviewees stressed that several of the steps in Figure 2 do not scale with the size of the election. For example, BOEs must recruit poll workers to staff every precinct whether it is a presidential election or a local-issue election. Nor does the timeline shrink for smaller elections: Some things must be completed in sequence within legally required windows of time: for instance, before mail-in ballots can be sent to voters who request them, the ballot language for each precinct must be approved and proofed. And then, of course, in-person early voting begins 30 days before the election.

This is still not a complete picture of the effort behind each election. For example, before each election, all electronic voting machines must undergo "logic and accuracy testing" to ensure they count votes properly. Before ballots can be certified, they must undergo an extensive proofing process to make sure candidate names match their filings exactly and that the names of candidates are rotated so no one gains an advantage by appearing at the top of the list in every precinct. After the election, BOEs are required to audit results to ensure the accuracy of the count. They must also coordinate the retention and storage of a wide range of materials determined by the secretary of state. As one official said, after the 100-day march to the election, there is still a month of work left to do.

These challenges have led to problems with retention and recruitment.

This exhaustion has workforce-wide effects. Elections administrators who can retire, do. Others leave for public sector jobs where they are paid the same for less stress, or for private sector jobs— sometimes with elections vendors—where they are paid significantly more. In a 2024 report, the Bipartisan Policy Center found that between 2018 and 2022, the BOE director turned over in half of Ohio's 88 counties.[4]

[4] The comparable rates for Ohio's neighbors were 64 percent of counties in Indiana, 57 percent in Pennsylvania, 29 percent in Michigan, 28 percent in Kentucky, and 11 percent in West Virginia. The report provides more recent estimates for 2020–2024 but warns they are "likely an underestimate, as 2024 data was collected in January of 2024."

"It's a little frightening. It's not an easy job to learn. You don't learn it in a year. You have to go through different types of elections; every election is a little different. Until you go through that whole cycle, you're still new … I worry about [the possibility of] mistakes being made.

This will be the first presidential [election] for half of my staff … When I go to conferences, I see a lot of new people. It's a little worrisome. But election officials in general are very dedicated.

Across the state, I am concerned. There has been an exodus of very good election officials … some very good officials have left because the culture of elections has changed. The expectations on officials have increased in reference to what we should know [and] what we should be responsible for, but we haven't been given all of the resources and assistance needed to make elections more efficient.

If one county does something wrong, they are going to assume we are all doing it wrong … we succeed or fail together."

Ohio elections administrators on turnover in their profession

According to an anonymous interviewee, turnover among BOE members and staff has been at a rate of 10-15 percent since 2020. Typically, board members turn over at a faster pace than professional staff, but many interviewees shared the view that the departure rate for professional staff has been accelerating. Several remarked on the number of new faces they see at annual conferences.

Turnover results in the loss of valuable institutional memory. Directors with a dozen or more years of experience are leaving. Interviewees said that some counties have gone through multiple pairs of directors and deputies in just a few years. Every experienced director who leaves is one less

potential mentor for newly incoming directors; the need for mentors is reflected in the OAEO's decision to reduce the experience requirement to become a mentor from two years to just a single year. One county director, who requested to remain anonymous, said that "more and more counties statewide … don't have anyone to guide them."

In interviews, election administrators openly worried that this would lead to mistakes. Jennifer Morrell, CEO of The Elections Group, a nationwide organization working to improve election administration, said helping new and overburdened administrators minimize mistakes is one of the most important ways organizations like hers can support administrators this year, explaining that "We're trying to create resources to make sure local offices have documented, written procedures [and] templates to create procedures when they don't have any, and to create checklists if they don't have those." Morrell credited her military experience and its emphasis on standard operating procedures for this approach. She also said election administrators should have a plan for if things do go wrong: "When a mistake or problem does occur," she asked, "how are you going to assess it? … Who are you going to call and what are you going to say?"

One interviewed BOE director recalled that a nearby county had to let a newly hired director go after it was clear she was in over her head. Miami County had a similar experience in 2019, when the board of elections fired the director after a computer error led to more than 6,000 uncounted votes. Miami County Board of Elections Chair Dave Fisher said that accidents like this are more likely as experienced professionals leave the field. When the new director, Laura Bruns, began her tenure, "the first thing" she did was sign up the staff for additional training through the OAEO. She also advocated to the county for higher pay in order to be able to attract and retain competent staff. Fisher said that this required significant convincing, recalling that at one point he had to ask the county commission, "Do you want to be in the news again?"

Recruiting new staff in this environment is also difficult. Few people sign up willingly knowing what the job entails. Shannon Johnson, director of the Ashland County BOE, recently hired two new staff; she worried that applicants "didn't understand the total scope of the job," and said she had to offer a higher hourly wage to attract "good-quality people." Kathy Meyer, director of the Allen County BOE, said that recruiting can also be difficult because BOE staff must be bipartisan per resolution of the board, but it can be difficult to attract a sufficient number of qualified applicants from the minority party. Laura Bruns, director of the Miami County BOE, wondered if people were in general reluctant to "take on a job like this in a year like this." Tonya Wichman, director of the Defiance County BOE, said that "election officials are under a constant microscope," adding additional pressure to an already full workload. Any free time is spent trying to educate the community on the security of elections. She described helping train inexperienced staff in a nearby county when their director and deputy director left and helping them "take care of Northwest Ohio together." But she warned that given the demands on her own office, this was unsustainable. "Eventually," she said, "you're going to have to pay companies to come in and train them." Were that to happen, it would require a significant effort from the secretary of state to provide quality control and guardrails against misconduct or mistakes. It would also require resources that might be preserved if state and county governments address problems more proactively.

Election officials prepare for turnover and search for coping mechanisms.

To cope with the risk of turnover and make due with small staffs, many BOEs crosstrain their employees in multiple functions. Paul Adams, director of the Lorain County BOE, said his office tries to have redundant processes and additional staff "ready to go" because it allows them to respond when problems come up. In general, interviewed BOE staff felt strongly about the importance of professional training and

"I have good-quality people, and if I don't want them to leave, I have to pay them and pay them well … Commissioners tend to compare full-time people here with other county staff, but it's not at all the same. The job has changed so much and become more demanding."

Laura Bruns, Director, Miami County Board of Elections

were proud of their participation in programs like the Ohio Registered Election Official (OREO) certification program at The Ohio State University (OSU).

A board member in a larger county spoke about the responsibility to have succession plans in place when staff move on. Megan Hasting, who manages the OREO certification program at OSU, also raised succession planning as an issue—and also as an example of how OSU adapts its curriculum to the needs of professionals.

Most BOEs said their greatest sources of support and resilience came from interpersonal relationships. Many expressed gratitude for the OAEO's support, not just for its legislative advocacy but also its winter conference, which allows them to meet with peers and complements the secretary of state's summer conference.

"When you're not around people, it does make it harder," said Laura Bruns; "You start to get a little bit isolated. You need people to call if you have a question. I can call people in like-size counties all over the state … There are a handful of people who do this job in every county. It's not like I can go down the street to find support." Or more succinctly, as another director said, "We all help each other."

Election officials' work is more complex than in the past.

Adding to the challenges presented by the recent frequency and unpredictability of special elections, changes to election administration in recent years have increased the workload and complexity of the job. Most BOEs do not have department teams; the smallest are staffed just by a director and a deputy director. That means any new responsibilities—in cybersecurity, grant reporting, public communications, or other areas—fall directly on their shoulders.

These new requirements add up: As one said in an interview, "The workload and stress have probably tripled." Many BOE staff said that their county government has not increased their compensation in stride with these new demands.

The most commonly cited example was in cybersecurity, which has been a priority for the secretary of state's office for almost a decade. Every official interviewed recognized the importance of cybersecurity to elections. But they also noted that while the state offers grants for cybersecurity procurement, with that money comes reporting requirements which become a time burden on staff. Some counties rely on county IT departments for support; others hire vendors to provide dedicated support to the BOE. Each approach has drawbacks: Vetting vendors takes time, and vendors may work offsite, but countywide IT departments may not view the BOE as a top priority.

Cybersecurity was not the only area affected by new logistical challenges and resource scarcity. Administrators also said that recruitment of poll workers has become a pain point. In an interview, Chris Dennison from the Clermont County BOE said, "It is a perennial challenge to hire the over 750 poll workers needed to conduct an election, but our team rises to the challenge." The increased difficulty in recruiting poll workers is partially due to the low pay: Workers earn just $133 a day, for days that can last longer than 12 hours. That can average out to less than Ohio's hourly minimum wage of $10.45.

On top of recruiting problems due to pay, directors now worry about the risk of rogue poll workers motivated to sign up by their belief in anti-voter and extremist conspiracy theories. Such a worker could act in ways that sabotage the election process. As one interview participant said, in an office that functions like "Noah's Ark"—a bipartisan team of two is required for every task—poll workers cannot be seen casting doubt on the election process or promoting a particular party or viewpoint. "It saddens me that I have to spend time worrying about what a rogue poll worker could do," they said. "[We] used to be desperate for staff, but now you have to question [people's] motives. I've had to let poll workers go over this."

The retention of documents and storage of equipment is another challenge: BOEs can struggle to obtain funding from county governments to procure necessary space. Laura Bruns from the Miami County BOE put it this way:

> ***"... some of the space I'm asking for would only get used in the month before election day, but when we have that month we need it, and we need it all at the same time ... Sometimes, it's going to be empty or not used. But when we need it, we need it. The amount of equipment, the amount of storage, the amount of space we need to train people, the number of people required to operate the early voting center ... sometimes I feel like we're not taken seriously."***

Accusations about trustworthiness and the **risk** of **violence have crushed morale**

Since the 2020 election, accusations of election fraud and wrongdoing by election officials have become a common feature in American politics. The constant scrutiny and, worse, the attacks on their trustworthiness have become a major source of concern for election workers. For their hard work to hold elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, a postponed primary, and an unanticipated August special election, they have been rewarded with uncomfortable—even aggressive—confrontations with voters who believe Ohio's elections are rigged.

Fortunately, few election officials interviewed for this research reported threats against their life or person, but many described confrontations with voters in public or even aggressive interactions between voters and poll workers. Several said that voter skepticism was their greatest concern going into the 2024 elections. Some have been accused of treason or told they should be in prison by members of the public. Many described encounters with upset voters in BOE offices, or incidents where voters yelled at poll workers. One administrator confided that she had been stared at by members of the public during her children's school sporting events.

"I have heard candidates, and I've also heard elected officials ... take it up to the line and then they stop. Especially our local folks. When you get to statewide or the national side, some of those folks are just outright saying it."

David Fisher, Chairman, Miami County Board of Elections, on election denial

> **"They're playing to their political bases. They don't care what impact that has on you." ,**
>
> *Anonymous BOE director*

When asked to weigh election denial as a challenge to operations and morale against exhaustion from the recent frequency of elections, most said the two were roughly equal. One said that the two challenges feed into each other: The perceived politicization of the elections calendar harms public trust in the electoral process. This distrust makes the business of election workers more difficult: Voters become angry to the point of making threats when faced with common obstacles like delayed delivery of absentee ballots, regardless of whether or not the election official or worker had any control over it.

"I am extremely concerned that there will be heightened levels of threats, harassments, and intimidation as this election year progresses."

Anonymous BOE director

"I love what I do. I hate what's being done to it."

Tonya Wichman, Director, Defiance County Board of Elections

Officials are preparing for security threats.

Officials who remain in the field increasingly seek training in subjects like conflict de-escalation and leadership in stressful environments. Some have instituted new security protocols for their offices and personnel. "[I am] more aware of my surroundings at work," said Karen Pawloski, deputy director of the Washington County BOE. At the end of the day, her team leaves the office together. "I started feeling this way … between the pandemic and the chaos of 2020. It seems far away, but it was just madness," she said. Other interview participants described new security precautions like security film on windows, new protocols for which doors must be locked, and panic buttons for county offices. While these changes began before 2020, they became more urgent that year and in the years since.

The dangers are real. After election officials in Washington state received letters laced with fentanyl, the Ohio secretary of state sent a letter warning BOEs to change the way they handle mail and to store Narcan, a medication for reversing opioid overdoses, in the office. Morale has taken a predictable hit: Dave Fisher, Miami County's BOE chairman, asked if staff "really wanted to work in that kind of situation." Paul Adams in Lorain County noted that "the people handling the mail are often retired … They are doing it as a community service … These people are essentially volunteering their time, and now they are placed in that kind of danger."

Interview participants also recalled having to call law enforcement to deal with incidents at polling places. Police are not allowed to be stationed at polling places, but they are often on alert in case they are needed to respond to a problem. One BOE director recalled an intoxicated voter threatening to punch poll workers for being Democrats. Another recalled a threatening individual who mentioned "something about a gun"—they rushed to the site while their deputy called the sheriff's office. Fortunately, no one was harmed. But as one interview participant said, they are now more wary of threats than they had to be in the past. They wished there were greater consequences for threatening election workers—and that those behind them could be held accountable.

When voters approach election officials in Ohio about false rumors of fraud, those officials often respond that they "know how it works in Ohio" and that the state requires robust protections for its elections.

Often, however, rumors deal with other states about which officials confess to know little. But election protections across many states are similar; officials do not have to concede that there may be fraud in other states. For more details, see:

"United in Security: How Every State Protects Your Vote" William T. Adler, Elizabeth Cassin, Gideon Cohn-Postar, Matthew Germer, and Chris McIsaac, Bipartisan Policy Center (March 25, 2024).

Social media and elected representatives are sources of false rumors about elections.

Interview participants said that most of the rumors they hear from the public spread online. But in some cases, elected government representatives make similar claims. This can be especially damaging to morale, because election administrators make serious efforts to reach out to local or state elected officials and educate them about the election process. One recalled offering a tour of their office to an elected figure who questioned the security of Ohio's elections during a public meeting. The offer was declined.

One anonymous BOE director said that many elected representatives seem to lift talking points about election fraud from the national discourse. This often mirrors interactions between BOE staff and members of the public: while their local board may 'do it right,' that does not assuage concerns about what happens in other counties or other states.

Twenty years ago, "chaos in a different sense."

A few long-standing election officials recalled another low point in public trust, beginning 20 years ago around 2004 (although the recount in the 2000 presidential election cannot have helped). In 2004, Paul Adams from Lorain County recalled "an awful lot of concern at the polls in Ohio" as long lines and an election-day ice storm in the Northeast caused problems. Adams said that political tensions at the time led to "a change in tone from the extremes of the political landscape" and confrontations with election officials: "That tone didn't occur again until recently," he observed.

If trends in election skepticism and elevated risks of violence are cyclical, then they are currently at their highest point. Time and increased investment in trust-building,

community engagement, and transparency may bring them back down, if policymakers make it a priority.

The experience of former Cuyahoga County BOE Director Jane Platten suggests radical transparency is one place to start. Like Adams, Platten also drew parallels between 2004 and 2024: "It was the political nature of the circus that was going on at that moment in time. It was like the dawn of a new era," she said, remembering an incident when documentarian Michael Moore visited Cleveland to cover the disparity between wait times at polls in Black and white neighborhoods. Platten was not yet director, but she was in charge of media relations at the time; while Moore was in the BOE's media room, tensions rose to the point she was afraid someone would assault her then-director. "Those were the years where this weaponizing of the election process started to really elevate in the community as a way to gain strategic political positioning," said Platten.

Platten became interim BOE director in 2007 after Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, a Democrat, asked the entire Cuyahoga County elections board to resign after the 2006 election. That contest was marred by voting machine meltdowns and a scandal in which two officials were convicted of secretly rigging the post-election audit to avoid a time-consuming recount (but not to alter the results). "I'll never forget," said Platten, "it was March, [Secretary Brunner] calls me and says she fired all of my board members and that I was going to report directly to her for the March 2008 election." Platten doesn't recall threats of violence against her or her staff, but the board's office was a different story: "The environment of chaos is not dissimilar to now … We had Jersey barriers around the entirety of the building so someone didn't drive a car filled with explosives into [it.] Those were legitimate fears at the time … It was chaos in a different sense."

Some interviewees shared a sense of optimism that this wave of election skepticism will pass, just like doubts during the 2004 elections. For Platten's part, she set about rebuilding the BOE's credibility through improved transparency, including the policy of publicly auditing a sample of ballots by hand after each election. "It was under me

that we established that after every election we would say to the community, 'rest assured, this election was accurately performed, accurately executed.'" While this is standard practice in Ohio now, officials at the time were resistant to the idea of extra work after the election. "It was a fight. People didn't want the election to be audited," she said. In the end, though, Platten won the fight. Election administration in Ohio is better for it today.

Inconsistency in **voting rules** is **disruptive**

On January 6, 2023, Governor Mike DeWine signed House Bill 458 into law. It introduced significant changes to Ohio's rules around absentee voting, early voting, and strict voter ID requirements, among other elements of election administration.

In interviews, election professionals had mixed reactions to these changes (see Figure 3). On the whole, though, most agreed that many of the changes seemed unnecessary and that they wished legislators would ask more questions about the impact of rules changes before passing them into law. Interviewees often repeated some variation of "I wish legislators would ask how this affects us"; many complained that changes often feel illogical.

Sometimes, they require guidance from the secretary of state's office, but high turnover has made the staff there slower to respond than in the past. If replies from the secretary of state are a month or longer in coming—as can be the case—it significantly delays election administrators' work. Every change in voting law means downstream changes for the envelopes, ballots, training materials, websites, and other materials that BOEs procure, maintain, and use. One BOE director said they used to have all the materials they needed for two years stocked and ready; changes to voting law mean those materials are now outdated.

Figure 3

Consequences of HB 458 Changes to Voting Rules

Change	Interviewee Reactions
Photo ID required to vote. Some previously accepted forms of identification, like utility bills, no longer accepted. Voters can receive a state ID card for free.	In many counties, most voters already use a driver's license to vote. But this change more heavily affects urban counties, where voters are less likely to drive and more likely to use a utility bill or government check to verify their address. Infrequent voters are also less likely to know about this change. While voters without ID may cast a provisional ballot and return to the BOE to cure it, in practice, few do so after the election results are announced.
Cure period to correct a provisional ballot shortened from 11 days post-election to four.	Shortening the cure period allows elections to be certified more quickly at the cost of disenfranchising voters who miss this window.
Shortened the deadline to apply to cast an absentee ballot from the third day before the election to the seventh day before the election.	BOE staff said this change makes it more likely that voters will receive and return their ballot in time.
Absentee ballots received by mail must arrive by the fourth day after the election, instead of the 10th day.. before.	Most interviewees said that four days is too short a return window, because the USPS does not guarantee delivery that quickly. This is an especially difficult hurdle for overseas and military voters.
Requires an official form to request an absentee ballot; previously, the request could simply be made in writing.	An online system would be faster and easier for all involved. The current process is time-consuming and cumbersome for voters and officials alike, because the form must be printed out or requested from the BOE, then returned either in person or by mail.
BOEs can provide "not more than one" secure outdoor drop box on the premises of its office.	Some geographically large or more populous counties would welcome the ability to provide one or more additional drop boxes, properly monitored and located on government property, to reduce the number of late or lost mail-in ballots. This would also reduce interruptions to the work of BOE clerks during early voting.

"Don't try to fix things that aren't broken."

LaVera Scott, Director, Lucas County Board of Elections

"I don't think these changes really solved any problem that existed."

Laura Bruns, Director, Miami County Board of Elections

"Election law changes are a funny thing. I've seen good ones and not great ones. There's always unintended consequences."

Anonymous BOE director

Interviewees were not always negative. Some administrators believe that the legislature is becoming more sensitive to the impact of voting law changes, and they generally praised the OAEO as an effective vehicle for communicating with the legislature. But they warned that whenever rules change, it takes years for voters to adjust, because many people vote only every four years.

For this reason, election professionals expect a larger than normal number of provisional ballots in this year's presidential election—even as the rejection rate for provisional ballots across the state continues to rise following the passage of House Bill 458. As one said, "The main impediment to voting is not understanding the process … It is not incredibly difficult, but there are deadlines and rules that people are not always aware of." While a few BOE directors said that voters bear some responsibility for educating themselves on these rules, legislative changes can introduce confusion.

The new voter ID requirements were a common example. Rules like these have become common sources of

nationwide controversy in recent years. They have already had an impact: Ashland county BOE Director Shannon Johnson noted that in 2023, one Ashland County race for mayor resulted in a tie vote. The 62 absentee ballots which the BOE received after the deadline might have flipped the result if any came from the affected municipality. “Sixty-two votes is a lot for our little county,” she said.

Most interviewees also said that shortening the return time for mail-in ballots to four days after the election made the deadline unfair and “too tight,” because USPS would not guarantee that turnaround time. Others cited the impact on overseas and military voters, who may have more difficulty getting a ballot in on time.

On the other hand, interviewed election professionals praised the decision to move up the deadline for mail-in ballot applications, saying that mailing ballots which they knew would not reach voters in time often felt misleading. For example, Sherry Poland, director of the Hamilton County BOE, said that “Every election cycle … I'm putting [ballots] in the mail during those final days before election day, knowing it won’t reach the voters in time … Now there’s not this false hope.”

But the transition to an official form to request an absentee ballot has caused confusion among voters, who now have to either print—or if, as is increasingly common, they don’t have a printer, request the BOE mail them—the form. Then the form must be returned by mail to the BOE. An online system for requesting an absentee ballot would save both election officials and voters time.

Even simple changes to forms can cause confusion. This was the case with form 12-B, the provisional ballot affirmation, which was revised after the passage of HB 458. After that change, the proportion of provisional ballots rejected because voters incorrectly filled out their date of birth (DOB) on the form nearly doubled, from 0.4% of rejections in the preceding three November elections to 0.9% in the 2023 general election. While it is difficult to compare absolute numbers across elections because turnout varies significantly each year, at the high end, this represents hundreds of rejected ballots. This increase was not even across the state; for several years,

Montgomery County, the state's fifth largest by population, was the site of more than half of all provisional ballots rejected for an incorrect DOB. After the passage of HB 458, this proportion fell—but Hamilton County's rose to encompass more than a third of all rejections for an incorrect DOB statewide.

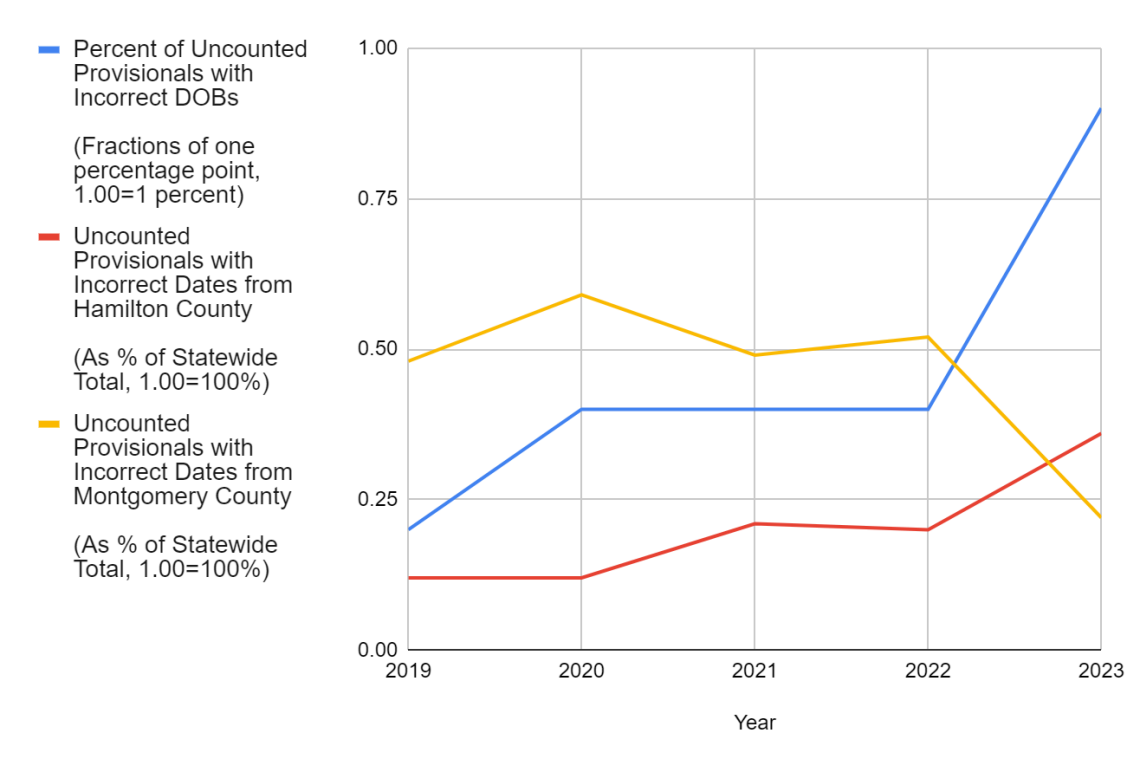
Sherry Poland, the director of Hamilton County's BOE, said in a phone call that after HB 458, the provisional ballot form—Form 12-B—was changed to include more text, which reduced the size of the DOB field. Hamilton was one of two counties who used a vendor with a smaller slot for ballot envelopes, and as such the field was smaller in Hamilton than in other parts of the state. Hamilton County has since upgraded to new equipment with a larger slot, allowing them to increase the form's size. Poland said this has reduced the rejection rate. "It's the same form, but we made it larger," she explained.

Voting rights groups have pointed out discrepancies between the law and the wording on the form...

Hamilton County's experience does not solve all problems with Form 12-B. What it does show is how seemingly insignificant changes to paperwork and process can affect voters. Voting rights groups have pointed out discrepancies between the law and the wording on the form, lack of standardization for how incomplete forms should be processed across BOEs, and other problems which individual boards—or the secretary of state—should address.

Figure 4

The percentage of provisional ballots rejected during November general elections due to incorrect DOB skyrocketed after HB 458 in January 2023.



All calculations based on numbers provided at "Election Results and Data," Office of the Ohio Secretary of State. Hamilton County's BOE said in a phone call that changes to the form have reduced the rejection rate. Official provisional ballot counts were not publicly available for the 2024 primary election at the time of writing.

Public communications is an **increasing demand**

The increase in public distrust in the election system and changes to voting rules mean that public communications is a more important part of election administrators' jobs. In an interview, one longtime director said that the increasingly public nature of their work is the largest change they've seen in recent years. "We spend more time in meetings talking about what good social media looks like, how we can get our messaging out … When I started in this business, we didn't worry about public perception … Now, 30 or 40 percent of my time is dedicated to managing public perception versus administering elections," they said.

Changes to training curricula reflect this assessment. According to program manager Megan Hasting, OSU's OREO program now offers trainings on "powerful public relations," engaging with a divided citizenry, de-escalating conflict, and crisis communications.

However, most BOEs are not staffed to meet this challenge, because their budgets do not support a full-time communications staffer. One interview participant estimated that less than a dozen boards had someone dedicated full-time to public relations or communications. Instead, these responsibilities usually fall on the director and deputy director, in addition to their other responsibilities. The gap in resources means that small counties rely on community meetings and local newspapers to reach the public, while larger counties have dedicated social media presences, offer tours of their facilities, and engage in other efforts to educate the public.

Public communications is essential to educate the public about voting rules.

The recent changes to Ohio's voting process have also required more public communications from boards of elections. Paul Adams in Lorain County called public education the "complicated part" of voting law changes, as opposed to

implementing the changes themselves. Boards often rely on earned media from TV and print news outlets, inviting journalists on tours to "look behind the curtain" of election administration. While one observer interviewed said they had not yet seen boards using "more aggressive" approaches like billboards or direct mail, they predicted this would be a big topic in 2024.

LaVera Scott, Director of the Lucas County BOE, said that she has seen confusion among voters who previously used utility bills to vote. She explained that the new voter ID requirements primarily affect seniors, students, and people who can't drive. Scott believes voters are "already becoming more accustomed to the rules," but those who vote only in presidential years may not be aware of them. To help inform voters, the BOE requested advertising money from the county commission so it could raise awareness through local newspapers.

"There's always a bipartisan team making decisions and doing work, there's a lock on my doors that it takes a Democrat and a Republican to open, my board is bipartisan, every decision that is made is bipartisan … Even if they wanted to change the results, they couldn't."

Shannon Johnson, Ashland County Board of Directors

Election denial has made election administration a more public-facing role.

To confront rumors about the security of Ohio's elections, many administrators now spend a significant portion of their time speaking to community groups and posting to social media. Very few boards, however, have the budget to employ dedicated communications or public relations professionals; these functions are usually carried

out by a staffer wearing many hats, sometimes including the director and their deputy. One anonymous director explained that they previously preferred to work behind the scenes, a luxury they can no longer afford in the era of widespread election denial. Moreover, they said, the starting point of interactions with the public is now more often negative. Boards of elections find themselves working from a deficit of trust, through no fault of their own.

Larger counties typically have more resources to devote to public relations. Sherry Poland in Hamilton County described her office's social media plan as "very robust." Voters in the Cincinnati area can hear from their board of elections on Facebook, X (née Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram. She said they produce short videos showcasing their processes and team. "We have a series of 'did you know' videos,'" she explained in an interview. "We want people to know we're not an evil wizard behind a curtain. We are members of your community, your neighbors, your friends." To this end, Hamilton county's BOE also runs "behind the ballot" tours during which participants can see where election processes are carried out. Some of these are specifically aimed at local journalists; others are intended for candidates on the ballot, Poland explained, so that they are "confident in how [the election] was administered regardless of the outcome." They stress that none of the equipment is connected to the internet, that logic and accuracy testing is conducted on voting machines before the election, and that results are audited afterward. The idea for these tours initially came from tours of the BOE for Girl Scouts, who were encouraged to vote and received a merit badge.

Some interview participants were envious of Hamilton County's programs and wished they could be expanded. But for many counties, funding strictly limits the options for voter education and public communication. Many BOE directors' public outreach is largely limited to appearances at Rotary or Kiwanis clubs, other local community groups, and county political party meetings. Because of the crowded election calendar in recent years, in small counties, even these can be difficult to arrange.

"[We] want people to know we're not an evil wizard behind a curtain … Whenever someone first comes to work at the board, the first thing they say is 'I didn't know how much work goes into conducting an election … I had no idea it worked this way.'"

Sherry Poland, Director, Hamilton County Board of Elections

"There are elected officials spreading things I wish they knew more about… My policy is, if anyone questions me, I invite them in for [a] tour."

Anonymous BOE director

Election denial myths are easily disproved but hard to debunk.

Debunking rumors of election fraud is not difficult because they are credible; in fact, most are easily disproved by explanations of the many safeguards in place during Ohio's elections. Rather, the challenge lies in reaching the public with limited resources and coping with the small minority who will never be persuaded by any evidence.

In interviews, officials seemed exasperated by the number of times they had repeated the many safeguards in place to prevent fraud. Despite this, officials interviewed for this report expressed an admirable commitment to dialogue with the public. They viewed questions as welcome so long as they are not accompanied by hostility, and they tried to create opportunities for the public to

learn more about their work. One tells their critics, “please come to our audit.” Another invites skeptics to be poll workers or to attend the logic and accuracy testing which all voting machines are subjected to. Many are impressed, though as one interviewee put it, “You might have 10 percent who are still doubting Thomases even after they’ve watched it and participated.”

One major safeguard runs through every part of a board of elections' work: the requirement that it be staffed bipartisanly. Alisha Lampert, the director of the Greene County BOE, said that “there are three doors on each [voting] machine. You need a Republican and a Democrat to unlock all of them,” referring to the system of requiring two keys—one carried by a Democratic staffer, one carried by a Republican—to access certain rooms or systems. “I can’t even get into the building without a Democrat in the morning,” said Lampert. In fact, her personal office is one of the few spaces in the building she can access without a bipartisan counterpart. Another BOE director described four such double-locked rooms in their office: one holding the equipment for election day, another for computer servers, another for storing absentee ballots, and finally the early voting room.

Administrators often hear from members of the public who insist that election results should be counted by hand, because they “don’t want machines tabulating” the vote. Election officials insisted that not only would this take much longer, it would also introduce more mistakes. Members of the public sometimes repeat rumors involving foreign hacking of voting machines, or concerns about equipment made in China. But Ohio law requires that voting machines are never connected to the internet. Likewise, machine-counted results are audited after each election, and the machines cannot legally be used for voting if they are not tested for accuracy beforehand.

Election deniers can gum up the works.

The increase in public hostility has been accompanied by burdensome public records requests. In September 2022, all 88 counties in Ohio received public records requests for an expansive set of documents related to the 2020 election, just weeks before they were scheduled to be destroyed. The requests were identical—many interview participants described them as having been "cut and pasted" from the same source—and extremely thorough, involving hundreds of thousands of pages of material. To some, it seemed as if they requested every scrap of paper from the 2020 election.

These requests were a burden in time and resources. Hamilton County created two new positions—a compliance officer and a communications officer—to help deal with the requests. Director Sherry Poland said they were "fortunate" to be able to do this going into the presidential election, when the extra capacity could also help educate voters. Smaller counties were left hiring outside firms to wade through the requests, assemble the requested documents, and redact them as necessary. One person familiar with the requests called them "a huge resource drain." In the end, the cost was borne by Ohio taxpayers.

Election denial can interfere with processes in other ways. This is especially evident when politics spills over into the board of elections. This happened in Miami County when candidate for Sheriff Paul Reece filed a protest with the board claiming that the incumbent Sheriff, Steve Duchak, had violated rules around campaigning while on duty. The board eventually referred the complaint to the Ohio attorney general, noting that it did not have jurisdiction over the law in question. When interviewed, Board Chairman Dave Fisher called this a "big headache" which forced the county to delay proofing ballots until the attorney general issued a ruling, despite a looming deadline. "[It] put us in a terrible box," said Fisher. "It became meeting after meeting after meeting."

The "Collaboration Ban" is **unclear** and **inconsistent**

Since September 2021, section 3501.054 of the Ohio Revised Code has banned election administrators from collaborating with or accepting money from nongovernmental persons or entities for any election-related purpose, with few exceptions. The rationale behind this "collaboration ban"—the nation's most strict—was to prevent wealthy individuals from making grants to boards of election, as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg did in 2020. Ultimately, more than 2,100 local election offices applied for the grants provided by Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, through the Center for Tech and Civic Life; most applicants worked in jurisdictions with fewer than 25,000 people. When asked how they intended to spend the money, the most common responses were supplies for mail-in or absentee voting, temporary staffing, poll workers, and personal protective equipment.

While many states restrict BOEs from accepting private donations, Ohio is unusual in its ban of any collaboration for "election-related purposes," however defined. In practice, the meaning of collaboration is unclear, and the ban is challenging for local officials to navigate. Despite limited guidance from the Ohio attorney general, county prosecutors may interpret the law differently across the state. Most BOEs said in interviews that this law has not changed their approach to administering elections, but some said that because of the collaboration ban, it now takes additional time to determine if they can accept various forms of support. "We put everything we have into making sure the election is done correctly," said one. "Now having to work through this on top of it makes it really difficult."

"You're allowed to communicate. A great example for us is that we have a large university in our county … We keep open lines of communication with their voting program on campus. It benefits both of us to make that a smooth and informative process. One could say that is collaboration. I would say it's just good communication between government offices.

Obviously, funding is not allowed. No one has ever wanted to give us anything. Suddenly, there was funding with no strings attached! So I was able to benefit my voters and save taxpayer dollars, and somehow that was viewed as bad. I think that's unfortunate. We used the funding to get a letter-opening machine … we intentionally bought equipment that could be used long-term … that was really our rule for it. We've had to beg and plead for everything."

Anonymous BOE director

Guidance is often inconsistent, and officials can be reluctant to commit it to paper for fear of being wrong. For example, some BOEs have advised not to accept food donations for precinct workers, even though that is an exception written clearly and explicitly into law. When one election administrator asked the secretary of state if they could use donated space from a church, they received the answer as a phone call, not in writing. "[We] get that a lot," they explained. While the "use of any building to conduct an election" is another exception written into the law, county prosecutors are not always well-versed in election law and are sometimes skeptical of even this clearly permissible form of support.

Most interviewees said they believed they are allowed to

go and present information to community groups—an interpretation consistent with guidance from the Ohio attorney general's office. It is less explicitly clear that information can flow the other way—-if election officials can attend events like trainings or seminars—but it is often presumed this is the case. "We don't interpret 'collaborate' to mean you can't go and listen," said one interview participant. Where the line becomes "blurrier," said one, is "when they call you and ask about doing a registration drive" and whether or not the board can provide them with materials.

The ban prevents some helpful forms of community outreach.

Some interviewees said that they could do even more to inform and educate the public about elections and voting if this law were clarified or narrowed. While the ban was allegedly intended to prevent donations from wealthy individuals from influencing elections, in practice it has chilled and frozen smaller efforts that are much more inoffensive. This can be especially limiting for smaller counties, which previously leaned on community groups to help with things that larger counties can afford to do on their own. One county BOE director said their board canceled plans to work with an educational "kids voting program," citing the collaboration ban as the reason why. Another was uncertain whether or not they could have a relationship with a program which encourages veterans and their families to become poll workers. One BOE director said their board told her she could not proactively reach out to community groups to speak to their members about the election; because of the collaboration ban, she had to be invited.

> **"The DATA Act is the newest thing... Some things do need to be done... but a lot of change, fast, is not necessarily a good thing."**
>
> *Brian Sleeth, Director, Warren County Board of Elections*

The ban doesn't just discourage BOEs from working with community groups; it can also discourage organizations that specifically exist to support election workers from engaging in Ohio. Jennifer Morrell, CEO of national organization The Elections Group, said that organizations like hers have to evaluate state laws carefully, and that vague rules can cause risk-averse organizations to keep their distance.

At a time when public confidence in the election system is under attack, community partnerships could also play a stronger role in restoring that confidence. Jane Platten, former Cuyahoga County BOE director, recalled in an interview her experience restoring the BOE's credibility after disastrous scandals in the 2006 election. Platten knew that the BOE "had to blow the doors open" and engage more consistently with stakeholders outside the BOE. "I started to go back and talk to the community, to talk to advocates," Platten explained. Working with the community was one way in which Platten encouraged the BOE to increase transparency—an essential ingredient for public trust. In the end, it made the election system as a whole more resilient:

> ***"If you're constantly walking into the building in warrior mode to fight the community, you'll never be able to focus on the work at hand. But if you respect the folks who may or may not have a different opinion, may or may not get on your nerves, if you give them the respect they deserve, [you can] establish a relationship where you can help each other achieve the same goal … So I would do community meetings, use that component, the media too … I would tell them, 'come on in, see what we're doing.' If you don't hide things, it makes it so much easier."***

Administrators are **uncertain about** the **DATA Act** but **hope** it **will ease vexatious public records requests**

In July 2023, Ohio passed Senate Bill 71—the DATA Act—into law. This bill would require the retention of electronic election records in a standardized format, accessible through a central portal. The law was praised by election nonprofits, including the D.C.-based Bipartisan Policy Center, which said in a statement that "Centralization of data collection and retention will expedite data reporting for local election administrators, enabling them to focus their efforts on other critical, more technical aspects of election administration. The DATA Act will also strengthen public confidence by requiring the secretary of state's office to publish election data that is digestible for voters and researchers."

Some elections professionals were hopeful that the creation of a central data repository might lessen the burden of what one called "vexatious public records requests." Another interview participant said that the public often requests "overwhelming amounts of information that they then frequently have trouble making sense of"; a standardized format for data reporting, while challenging to implement, could help with this problem. Others were less sure, noting that "a lot of the requests are local; I don't think those will go away. People will still come here because they are familiar with us."

While it could be beneficial, administrators interviewed for this report were uncertain about how the DATA Act will be implemented over the coming months. One, from the BOE in a less-populous county, worried that the automatic daily feed of voting statistics to the secretary of state would become just "another daily report that needs to be checked" and said "it's not always explained what the endgame would be or why." Another predicted that "there will be confusion among boards of elections around this law" and said that so far they have only received a high-level summary from the secretary of state. They believed smooth implementation will require more guidance and grant support.

More could be done to **prepare for,** and **take advantage of, emerging technology**

Going back to at least 2018, when computer scientists created a convincing—but fake—video of President Obama saying words he never uttered, academics, advocates, and journalists have discussed the dangers that artificial intelligence (AI) could pose to elections. Since then, the public release of ChatGPT and other generative AI tools have made it trivially inexpensive and easy to produce synthetic imagery, audio, and video content (colloquially called "deep fakes"). The 2024 elections have already seen several high-profile examples of campaigns, political consultants, and other actors using this technology in ways both above- and underboard. AI tools could also enable more-advanced spear phishing operations and other cyberattacks against BOEs, this year and in the future.

In interviews, participants were asked to discuss potential threats from new technologies like generative artificial intelligence, their preparations for such threats, as well as any election-related opportunities afforded by these technologies. Few participants were in a position to discuss any of these matters in detail. By and large, they are too strapped for bandwidth to think creatively about the new cyber and election security risks posed by AI, or the opportunities to use new technologies to streamline processes like ballot proofing or answering public queries. Megan Hasting, who manages OSU's OREO program, said that she has been thinking about the use of AI for public service, though she doesn't believe there is yet enough material to create a full course for elections officials. "We're just now starting to consider how we teach this to public service generally," she said.

Recommendations

This report has laid out several challenges facing Ohio's election workforce. The challenge of holding elections during a pandemic, followed by two years of back-to-back unexpected August special elections, has exhausted many professionals and caused others to leave the field. Attacks on their trustworthiness have sapped morale and introduced novel public relations challenges. These, along with increased cybersecurity needs and other elements, have made their jobs more demanding overall. New laws have added to these difficulties. So might new technologies—though, with foresight, these could also help.

In short, Ohio's election workforce is an exhaustible resource. Its current trajectory is unsustainable, but it is not unalterable. Below, this report offers several recommendations—for municipal and county governments, state lawmakers, and the Ohio secretary of state's office—which can help preserve this resource and improve elections in Ohio. It breaks these down into two categories: the first contains recommendations which can be pursued in 2024, either to improve the conduct of that election or to streamline processes and reduce workforce burdens. The second category contains longer-term responses requiring more time, larger investments, and sometimes legislative action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **2024:**

1. **County BOEs should create emergency mitigation and response plans, including crisis communications.**

   The number of special elections and other extraordinary events since 2020 have left election officials little time for proactive work. This, along with the high rate of turnover among experienced election officials, raises the risk of mistakes during the election process. In the current political environment, these mistakes could

rapidly become scandals or even crises—even if they are minor or quickly rectified.

Ohio's collaboration ban does not totally prevent election advocacy groups from working to address this issue. Some of those interviewed for this report say they make their resources publicly available online so that any BOE or member of the public can access them. Advocacy organizations could then curate and collect lists of these publicly available materials and provide them to BOEs with new staff. To the extent possible, procedures should be standardized and reinforced with detailed checklists which can be provided to less- experienced county staff. Detailed "what if" crisis communications plans should also be developed in cooperation with BOEs that have "lived through" past crises. Those plans should likewise be made available across the state so that no county starts from square one in case of an emergency. The Ohio secretary of state should play an important role in encouraging the creation of these resources and their distribution to BOEs across Ohio.

For resources including premade graphics that BOEs can use to communicate with voters over social media, consider this guide co-produced by the National Association of State Election Directors and the National Association for Media Literacy Education:

"Election Communications Toolkit" National Association of State Election Directors (accessed April 26, 2024).

2. **Expand resources and programs for public engagement.**

Constant attacks on the honesty of election officials have become an existential threat to morale, and changes to voting rules can be vexing for the public and officials alike. But public outreach by BOEs does not need to reach the most obstinate election deniers. It is more important and more effective to reach the "persuadable middle" and to be available to provide them with true information when they are looking for answers to election-related questions.

"Hamilton County has a really nice program, 'behind the ballot.' My office is nothing like theirs … [it's] way smaller. But I would like to take that tour with Sherry in Hamilton and offer something similar here."

Laura Bruns, Director, Miami County Board of Elections

Likewise, one of the most important roles a BOE plays is to inform voters of election rules and processes so that everyone who wants to vote can, and can be sure their vote counts. Counties and the state should increase resources for public communications so every board of elections in the state has capacity to more proactively inform and educate voters about their work and the voting process.

This is especially a challenge for midsize counties. Lisa Boggs from Preble County said that administrators in small counties can often use personal relationships to confront rumors and get out information about voting. Larger counties, meanwhile, have larger staffs. But the size of BOE teams in midsize counties varies widely across the state, and it is more difficult to build personal networks across larger populations.

Sherry Poland from Hamilton said that more training, even refresher training, would also help. She recalled that at a recent OAEO conference, Hamilton and Williams counties gave a "back to basics" presentation on how to use social media quickly and effectively. "Election officials shouldn't be afraid of social

media," she said in an interview. "You can do it quickly and effectively without taking a lot of time."

County and state governments should make extra resources available for these purposes. This is especially true when state legislators change voting laws, which come with inevitable consequences for ballot access.

3. **Improve statewide support mechanisms for boards with new staff or other acute needs.**

   In today's environment, turnover is a predictable challenge for election administration. Not only should state government, county government, and professional associations like OAEO help BOEs prioritize cross-training of staff and planning for turnover, the state especially should plan for personnel gaps—including at the leadership level.

   When the majority of a small BOE's staff leaves in a short period of time, as has been the case in some counties, their successors are left scrambling to learn and execute processes simultaneously. Sometimes, they are doing so while short-staffed as they wait for open positions to be filled. While BOEs in this position receive advice and moral support from nearby counties, this cannot fill the capacity shortfall and can only do so much to mitigate the risk of mistakes by new and overworked administrators. Jennifer Morrell from The Elections Group said that in states across the country, it is often election administration associations that fill gaps in capacity by coordinating for staff from one county to do rotations in another. But without government support, this approach merely spreads the strain out over enough area to become tolerable. It does not solve the problem.

   The secretary of state's office could address situations like this by planning for rapid response in the event of significant turnover in a single county BOE. One approach might be to send personnel from that office directly to affected counties. If the Secretary of state does not have or cannot obtain the capacity to do this, they should explore doing so through vendors or through direct support to

the OAEO. In practice, many new administrators receive training on key processes from election vendors, not the secretary of state's office. If contracting is the best way to bring new teams up to speed quickly while minimizing mistakes, that process should be expanded and formalized with appropriate guardrails and quality standards.

Improving response times should also be a priority for the secretary's office. Many county BOEs remarked on delayed responses from the secretary of state, which leads to delayed operations, increased workload, and an overall higher risk of mistakes. Sometimes this is the result of vague or unclear directives leading to questions about operationalization which might have been avoided with prior consultation. While recent turnover in the office has exacerbated this issue, it is not wholly new: Former Cuyahoga County BOE Director Jane Platten expressed frustration with delayed communications and decision-making from the secretary's office during her tenure, as well, calling it "non-transparent" and "a fight all the time" while recalling instances where last-minute decisions meant she had to wait for court rulings late the night before election day.

4. **Promote programs to de-escalate confrontation at the polls.**

   Election violence has the potential to be not just tragic but catastrophic. State and county governments should encourage community leaders—such as faith leaders and social workers—to volunteer as poll workers and especially to provide de-escalation services at polling places.

   Such election "peacekeepers" have served in previous cycles; the attorney general should state explicitly that such programs are allowed under section 3501.054 of the Ohio Revised Code, and county governments should encourage, promote, and materially support such programs wherever possible.

5. **Identify and resolve cross-county trends in provisional ballot rejection.**

   Even minute differences in counties can be crucial to determining whose vote counts and whose does not. The example of Hamilton County's increase in provisional ballot rejections due to an incorrect DOB is instructive here. Hamilton

County's BOE believes that simply by increasing the size of a form, it reversed the upward trend in rejections due to incorrect DOB.

A missed field on a form is a poor reason for a citizen's voice to be excluded from an election. This year and in the future, the secretary of state and the OAEO should look closely at rates of provisional ballot rejection across the state, and when a county appears to have an unusually high rejection rate, steps should be taken to ascertain why. Ideally, the causes of provisional ballot rejection should be addressed at the state level in ways that streamline the process and bring down the rejection rate; getting one's ballot to count should not feel like answering a trick question. But if statewide solutions are not forthcoming, the OAEO and individual BOEs should work to share best practices between counties.

County BOEs also have some independent discretion in how they process forms that are incomplete or incorrectly filled out. When necessary, they should act within their authority to simplify the provisional voting process and avoid rejecting ballots on purely procedural grounds. When they must request authority from the secretary of state to improve forms or make other process changes, the secretary should grant those requests.

6. **Consult more closely with BOEs while implementing the DATA Act.**

   Interviewed election officials said that the rationale behind the DATA Act is not clear to them and that they have been given only high-level information about its implications for their day-to-day work. The secretary of state's office should begin consulting with BOEs as soon as possible to ensure that required transparency measures are implemented in the manner least taxing for BOEs. It should also prioritize webinars and other training to make sure that election officials are ready to implement new procedures when the time comes. Voter advocacy groups can also push for this law to be implemented in the least burdensome manner possible, while helping less-experienced BOEs understand their compliance obligations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POST-2024:

1. **Consolidate the elections calendar.**

   The frequency of elections in recent years, and especially the unpredictability of August special elections, was the chief complaint of election administrators regardless of political affiliation. The constant churn of elections has worn down staff, taking them away from their families and driving many from the profession.

   To alleviate this pressure, the state should refrain from holding additional August special elections—in keeping with the spirit of HB 458. It should also encourage localities in the same county to consolidate municipal primary, special, and issue elections to the extent possible: As LaVera Scott from Lucas County said in an interview, local charters often contain decades-old provisions, sometimes out of step with state and federal law, requiring elections to be held at odd times. One charter, for example, had an October primary; Scott said it had been in the charter since the 1950s.

   These elections are not just stressful for BOEs; they are costly to Ohio taxpayers. The Ohio Constitution provides cities with tools to review and amend their charters. The state, county commissioners, and other government institutions should encourage charter cities to use those tools to bring election calendars into greater alignment.

2. **Repeal, clarify, or narrow section 3501.054 of the Ohio Revised Code, the "Collaboration Ban."**

   If the collaboration ban cannot be repealed outright, the Ohio General Assembly should consider clarifying or narrowing the ban against BOEs' collaborating with nongovernment entities for election-related purposes. Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose said the language in the ban was drafted "inelegantly" and should be modified; the Ohio House previously recognized the need to do so in 2022 with the passage of House Bill 564. The Senate should take up this bill, and both chambers should explore wider exemptions. At a minimum, lawmakers should

"We have five staff, should be six. Greene County has about 119,000 voters; other counties this size have 12 to 14 staff. We can only do so many jobs; there are only so many hours. Our board voted to hire two more people, but the county administration said no."

Alisha Lampert, Director, Greene County Board of Elections

"I've never worked a job with such stress, constant changes to rules, and minimal pay."

Anonymous BOE deputy director

more explicitly exempt a wider range of voter outreach activities or community partnerships meant to raise public awareness of voting laws, recruit a bipartisan pool of poll workers, and educate voters on election safeguards. It seems draconian that a law ostensibly intended to limit billionaires' political influence has implicated partnerships with groups representing veterans and schoolchildren. Government at all levels should not just allow but encourage these kinds of collaborations.

Conversely, the state could narrowly ban those activities most concerning to lawmakers while permitting others—for example, by exploring commonsense ways to allow BOEs to receive supplementary grants. This would require the legislature to articulate specific concerns about how

collaboration impacts Ohio's elections, which would be healthy for both public discourse and the election process. It would also allow BOE directors to pursue cost-saving investments: for example, one anonymous administrator said that they used private grant money only for equipment purchases which would streamline their operations for years to come, like a photocopier and a letter-opening machine. They felt it was unfortunate they were no longer allowed to supplement taxpayer dollars in this way.

3. **Create statewide standards for boards of elections' budget and compensation.** BOEs are funded primarily at the county level. This leads to widespread inconsistency in budgets and staff sizes, even in counties of comparable size and population. Some BOEs described difficulty attracting qualified applicants and having to "beg" for critical needs. In times of economic hardship, legal confrontations over election funding can waste time and taxpayer dollars.

   County governments and the state should explore ways to provide more-consistent, sustainable budgetary support for BOEs. Compensation levels, for example, could be spelled out in the Ohio Revised Code, which specifies the compensation for board members but not BOE staff. In the absence of enforceable requirements, though, the secretary of state's office should at minimum establish some guidance for appropriate compensation of BOE staff and benchmarks for what level of staffing and funding is realistically required to hold elections in counties of various sizes. This would better equip election administrators to advocate for themselves in budget conversations with county governments, and stronger compensation benchmarks could help with staff retention in an era of high turnover.

   Governments should also budget for procurement more proactively. Jennifer Morrell from The Elections Group suggested in an interview that county governments should create an annual line item to save for large election equipment upgrades—the way some municipalities do for snowplows and other investments.

The state government could theoretically do the same thing. Interview participants praised lawmakers for stepping in to provide money for big infrastructure upgrades when BOEs need it most: for example, in 2018 the state provided $115 million to replace aging voting machines. These kinds of expenditures could also benefit from proactive budgeting, but it is important that the state provide flexibility to counties regarding procurement of equipment and other major expenditures. Too many strings attached to funding is an undesirable constraint.

State funding should also not supplant county funds for BOEs; counties should not, in other words, reduce support to BOEs if the state provides for major statewide upgrades or expenditures. Sometimes, county commissions use additional state funding as an excuse to withhold resources from BOEs; for example, BOEs are able to "charge back" election costs from subdivisions that put forward ballot initiatives. In some counties, commissions hold that money in the general fund and do not return it to the BOE. Lawmakers should explore ways to limit this and other practices with the effect of reducing county commitments to election administration.

For both county governments and the state, tax windfalls from the sale of cannabis products following the passage of Issue 2 in 2023 could be a potential source of funding for elections.

In the end, proper funding for BOEs can be a cost-saving feature. Not only does it prevent mistakes, but failure to provide the required resources to run elections can lead to costly legal disputes. During the 2009 recession, when the Ashland County Commission cut the Ashland County BOE's budget after a countywide revenue shortfall, the BOE successfully sued the county commission for failing to adequately fund the department. The legal fees paid by the county were ultimately more than the requested funds.

4. **Improve the absentee voting and voter registration processes.**

By and large, election officials believe that every registered voter who wants to be able to cast a ballot should be able to cast a ballot. No matter what the rules are, they want them to be clear and consistent to avoid confusing the public and complicating their work.

That said, they identified a few areas where current rules could be improved—especially as regards mail-in voting. The state could allow voters to request mail-in ballots online, cutting down on the time it takes to send, receive, and process applications for absentee ballots. It could also create a "permanent absentee" status, especially for voters who are in the military, reside overseas, are elderly, or have mobility issues.

As regards voter ID requirements, one election administrator asked why voting is the point of confirmation, rather than registration: If a voter's eligibility and address are confirmed at registration, the state could invest in processes to update addresses of voters who move—-perhaps through the BMV or the Ohio Department of Taxation—rather

For additional resources on how election professionals around the country are using and thinking about responsible AI use, see:

"*8 best practices for state election officials on AI*," Norman Eisen, Nicole Turner Lee, and Samara Angel, Brookings Institution (March 11, 2024).

"*Safeguards for Using Artificial Intelligence in Election Administration*," Edgardo Cortés and Lawrence Norden, Brennan Center for Justice (December 12, 2023).

Implementing even more-typical technologies can be complicated for election officials, who may have to field public questions about any changes. **For a guide on constructive questions citizens might ask, see:**

"*A Guide: What to Ask When New Election Technology is Introduced*," Verified Voting (February 9, 2021).

than doing so at the point of voting, when remedies are least possible. While interviewed election officials were divided on the impact of shortening the deadline by which the BOE must receive mail-in ballots to four days after the election, many felt this deadline was unfair to voters. Voters expect that if they are able to have their ballot postmarked by the required deadline, it should at least have a reasonable chance of reaching the BOE on time, but the USPS does not guarantee mail delivery in four days. The state should reconsider the four-day deadline.

Some suggested future changes to ease these burdens on voters, such as the ability to request mail-in ballots online or the ability to request permanent absentee voter status (especially for seniors, military service members, college students, or voters with mobility challenges). Online registrations are also much faster for BOE officials to process.

5. **Allow county-by-county additions of a second ballot drop box, with appropriate security precautions.**

   Every county is unique. For this reason, local autonomy for county BOEs is a beneficial feature of Ohio's system. In this spirit, the state should allow counties the option to add additional ballot drop boxes, provided they can provide the necessary security required under state law.

   In interviews, some counties said they would decline this option if offered, because they lack the staff, space, or internet connectivity to provide a second drop box. But others said that their size or population mean a second drop box would lessen the number of times a day their clerks are interrupted from their work during early voting, reduce the volume of mail-in ballots and the resulting concerns about postal delays, and generally improve voter access. County BOEs should have the discretion to provide additional drop boxes in well-monitored, secure locations.

6. **Experiment with new technologies through pilot programs.**

   The proliferation of consumer-grade generative AI is a double-edged sword for election administration. More attention has been given to the increased risk of AI-enabled hoaxes and cyberattacks during the 2024 elections, and some secretaries of state have already begun to prepare for these potential threats. But artificial intelligence can also provide election officials tools to streamline application review, ballot proofing, voter communication, and other time-consuming duties.

   While a presidential election is not the time for experimentation, in future cycles, the state government should encourage election officials—and other state employees—to explore how emerging technologies can improve their work. Pennsylvania, for example, offers a pilot program for state employees to better understand "where and how generative AI tools can be safely and securely leveraged in their daily operations." Ohio could take a similar approach, piloting new uses of technology in specific counties before deciding to roll them out statewide.

   This technology is novel, and its adoption requires careful deployment so risks can be identified and mitigated. Former Cuyahoga County BOE Director Jane Platten advised caution:

> ***The process of running an election and counting ballots is incredibly laborious and very manual. When electronic non-paper voting systems came out, everyone thought it would be the answer to all the problems of having to touch a piece of paper … There are some things [for which] the old-fashioned way is just the best way. I would not encourage hurrying into AI. It is so new. It wouldn't be something that would be a quick decision. It is going to take a long time to get to a point where people should be comfortable … I'm not discouraging the potential, but let's be careful, let's take it slow.***

These are wise words. Even though new technologies could ease the burden on Ohio's election workforce, the risk of unforeseen consequences suggests the need for a cautious approach. But few election administrators interviewed for this report had the time or capacity to consider the benefits or risks of emerging technologies.

Megan Hasting at OSU's OREO program and others warned that election administrators' limited bandwidth causes them to struggle to roll out existing technology while managing vendors and complying with directives from the secretary of state. They have limited ability, logistically or legally, to proactively prepare or experiment with emerging technology.

A few interview participants did identify potential uses they might embrace. Some discussed its use in ballot-proofing, a time-consuming, cumbersome process that is still done manually.[5] Alisha Lampert, Director of the Greene County BOE, said she would "love to be able to scan registration cards and auto-populate" that information, which would streamline maintenance of the voter rolls. Paul Adams from Lorain County said he would be interested in better automated systems for answering routine voter inquiries. "On our Facebook page, we already have it set up [so that] if you ask [how to] register to vote, it will automatically reply," he said. "AI could help take that to another level … We get overwhelmed with the number of phone calls. Automating this would be very helpful." Ohio would not be the first state to pursue this idea, which is currently being implemented in Idaho.

Artificial intelligence is not magic, and it is not perfect. It is important to test and audit AI systems used for public administration, and any system should be implemented with a "human in the loop" to monitor for errors or undesirable outcomes. But implemented responsibly, AI tools could bring greater efficiency to cumbersome processes currently performed on outdated machines or on paper.

[5] Consider this guidance from the Ohio secretary of state's office, which lays out the ballot proofing process in painstaking detail: "When proofreading the ballot, it is a best practice to have one person read aloud what should be printed based upon the original source material, while another person follows along on the proof provided by the printing vendor or generated by the central tabulating system to ensure that what is going to be printed is what should be printed. When proofing candidate names, speak the candidate's name and then spell it aloud, letter by letter. When proofing candidate headings and ballot language, speak any numbers or dates one numeral at a time … Each board also must proof the candidate contests and ballot questions and issues for each precinct split against its voter registration system to ensure that each voter is receiving all of the correct combination of offices and districts based on the voter's residential address."

7. **Create programs to educate elected officials about the election process.**

   Elected officials are an important source of information about elections for voters, but many are not familiar with the details of election administration. Programs encouraging them to tour their local boards of election and volunteer as poll workers during off-cycle elections would strengthen their knowledge of democracy's essential machinery.

   This could apply to nearly all elected officials, but it should be considered especially valuable for county commissioners and state legislators who control BOE budgets and voting laws. It is also significantly important for BOEs in smaller or more rural counties, which have important differences from those in large urban counties but whose challenges are less well understood.

8. **Close schools on election day.**

   Schools are a common polling location: They are designed to accommodate large numbers of people, vehicles, and equipment, and are accessible to voters with disabilities. They also often have their own security systems in case of violent threats. This makes them near-ideal. But some school districts worry about the safety implications of holding elections while school is in session. As one administrator noted in an interview, West Virginia closes schools on the day of primary, special, and general elections; Ohio should do the same.

9. **Expand and improve on programs to recruit poll workers.**

   Recruitment of poll workers is a recurring challenge for election officials. Many BOEs rely on a workforce of aging retirees; each year, fewer and fewer can withstand a fourteen-hour shift on election day. While some ask to work a half-shift, this would effectively require recruiting, training, and managing twice as many workers.

   Government at all levels should invest time and resources into encouraging more citizens to become poll workers. One example which has won praise is the "Youth at the Booth" program, which allows 17-year-old students to work as poll workers.

Before HB 458, only 17-year-old seniors could do so; with civics classes now taught junior year in many schools, HB 458 expanded the program to include 11th graders. Legislators should consider lowering the age further, to 16, and boards of education should encourage civics teachers to promote this program through extra credit or other incentives. States and counties should explore programs to encourage further participation and other demographics, like veterans, who have been reliable sources of poll workers in the past.

College students are another largely untapped resource: Megan Hasting at OSU said that the state could do more to encourage college students to study elections generally. "There is a workforce pipeline challenge across public service," she said, and advocates that students who want to improve democracy should consider signing up as a poll worker or pursuing a career in election administration. She also said that while most best practices for engaging with students come from large urban counties like Franklin, there is a lot of opportunity for smaller counties to encourage student engagement through their local educational institutions.

Low pay—a maximum of $133 a day, below the minimum wage—also discourages citizens from taking on this essential role. Some administrators questioned why there is a maximum wage at all.

Several counties—including Mahoning, Lucas, Cuyahoga, Lorain, and Franklin—encourage county employees to become poll workers by allowing them to earn their base salaries while providing this service. Similar efforts should be replicated by county governments across the state and encouraged by the state government for government employees at all levels (municipal, county, and state). Government agencies can also encourage their employees to take advantage of professional training credits available to social workers and lawyers who volunteer at the polls, and search for other industries willing to offer similar incentives.

Conclusion

Recalling the 2020 election, held in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sherry Poland from Hamilton County recalled arriving at her office to find balloons tied to the front door of their facility. Someone had written "I [heart] BOE" on one of the balloons. This was unusual. "If voters are satisfied with our work, we typically don't hear much at all" from the public, she said. This sign of appreciation for her team's effort to maintain democracy through a global crisis remains meaningful years later.

> **"They're superheroes. Everything we do in public service has to do with having democratic access to the vote ...These people are rockstars of public service."**
>
> *Megan Hasting, Program Manager, John Glenn College of Public Affairs*

Unfortunately, since 2020, this appreciation has waned. In some corners of society, it has been replaced with hostility and anger toward the essential work of election administration. Elected officials sometimes echo these calls and use them to justify changes to voting rules and processes, with unforeseen, but not unforeseeable, consequences.

Election administration is a crucial point of failure for democracy and government in Ohio and the nation writ large. It is the foundation on which everything else stands. But it is under strain. It cannot be preserved with security measures alone. Its sustainability requires increased investment and concern from all levels of government.

Despite the grim environment and the demands placed upon them, one anonymous elections administrator concluded their interview by saying they believe that the United States will eventually emerge from its crisis of democracy. "We're gonna figure

this out," they said. "The next generation of election officials will be different, but I have a belief that we'll be fine … I'm hopeful that the next generation values things that [will] bring us back to a more civil discussion and to help us do our jobs no matter if we work for the police, at the board of elections, or at the factory down the road. We are all trying to do our jobs, feed our families, live life, go home. Eventually, people will figure that out."

About All Voting

All Voting is Local (All Voting) is a 501(c)(3), nonpartisan, multi-state organization that fights against state and local voting policies that silence Americans' voices, particularly for Black, Brown, Native American, and other historically marginalized communities — not just in election years, but every year. We were founded on the principle that the problems people face when trying to vote are solvable if state and local decision-makers are accountable to the communities they serve. All Voting is committed to working with our partners to advance fair, inclusive rules on voter registration, remove barriers that make it more difficult for people to vote, and ensure every vote counts. All Voting is on the ground in eight states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Within these states, we are active in more than 60 counties that are home to over 21 million people of color. During the 2022 cycle, All Voting programs expanded access for more than 635,000 voters. Learn more at www.AllVotingisLocal.org

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