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Cuyahoga County Board of Elections 2022-2023 Biennial Budget Testimony

**PRESENTED BY DIRECTOR ANTHONY W. PERLATTI
AT THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2021**

Introduction

Good Afternoon Chairman Miller, President Jones, and Members of Council. I am Anthony Perlatti, Director of the Board of Elections. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide budget testimony on behalf of the Board of Elections.

I am pleased to inform you that the 2022 and 2023 recommended biennial budget is sufficient for the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections (CCBOE) to effectively provide election services to all voters, candidates, committees, and political subdivisions in Cuyahoga County, which has about 880,000 registered voters—the most out of any county in the State of Ohio.

Overview

The Board's budget fluctuates significantly depending on the election year. The \$17.3 million budgeted for 2022 will cover costs for the two known elections. The \$15.5 million budgeted for 2023 will cover costs for the three known elections in that year. As in past budgets, we are not requesting funds for unknown special elections. Therefore, we will request funding for any special elections that arise during this biennium on an as needed basis. The Board charges back many of the costs associated with conducting the special election to the election jurisdiction. Additionally, the board charges election jurisdictions specific election costs as outlined in statute. The charges vary for elections conducted in even and odd years with all chargebacks deposited back into the County General Fund.

The immediate operational issue we are addressing in this budget cycle is the staffing shortages and difficulty attracting seasonal temporary staff and election day poll workers. The Board is recommending wage increases to compete with the food and retail industries that are rapidly increasing their wages to

between \$15.00 and \$18.00 per hour and with whom we compete for seasonal temporary staff. The Board feels, an increase to seasonal temporary staff wages from the current \$11.50 to \$15 per hour would be a competitive rate to attract and retain seasonal employees. Ohio statute defines that boards of elections hire 4 poll workers per precinct which equates to a little under 4,000 individuals in countywide elections in Cuyahoga County. In 2021 the Board has not met this recruitment goal and has averaged 3 poll workers per precinct using a safety net clause contained in statute to hire less than 4 poll workers per precinct. These poll worker staffing levels have worked with the 2021 low turnout elections but will be problematic in the high turnout elections we anticipate in 2022. The stipend for election day poll workers has been recommended at \$250, which matches what we were able to pay in 2020 utilizing grant funds and more in line with other similar-sized counties.

The 2020 Presidential Elections were like no other elections the CCBOE has ever administered. The CCBOE was fortunate in being awarded approximately \$3.5 million grant dollars in 2021, from various sources, to assist with the unexpected and voluminous expenses, workload and challenges associated with executing large elections during a pandemic. The CCBOE utilized grant dollars to primarily purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), but also to acquire election-related automation hardware and software to enhance how we conduct elections. Some of the investments in hardware and software come with ongoing annual maintenance costs that require budgetary allocations. These maintenance costs are incorporated into the budget recommendation and with time we will see some of the maintenance costs offset with reductions in seasonal temporary employee staffing levels.

New Initiatives / Increased Expenditures

Some of the key initiatives and expenditures that impact this budget cycle are as follows:

- *New Voting Equipment:* The Board is currently in the process of selecting new voting equipment (precinct ballot scanners, vote-by-mail ballot scanners and supporting technical equipment). This equipment is purchased through state term pricing and the Board is currently vetting three (3) vendors from who a final selection will be determined. In 2018, Senate Bill 135 made \$10.4 million available to Cuyahoga County to acquire the new equipment. Dependent on which vendor is selected, ancillary items will need to be purchased to support the new voting system that do not qualify for use of in the \$10.4 million funding. The Board is hopeful to make a vendor selection in 2022 and bring that selection before this Council for purchase approval. At that time, I anticipate bringing a request before you for an additional appropriation to cover the ancillary equipment specific to the selected vendor. The costs associated with the ancillary purchases are not known at this time and hopefully do not exceed 10% of the purchase price.

- Poll Worker Stipends: Bringing the payment rates back to those paid in 2020 is crucial in meeting the statutory requirements for poll worker staffing and provide a fair wage for this important civic duty.
- Seasonal Temporary Employee Wages: The Board can almost triple its workforce during election cycles and these seasonal staff are necessary to administer the comprehensive services provided by our agency. Increased hourly wages should help with recruitment challenges.
- Election Equipment Maintenance and Licensing: The improvements to operations witnessed by purchases made with 2020 grant funds have positively enhanced voter services in multiple areas. Continuation of these operational enhancements must be maintained.
- Cybersecurity Enhancements: The State of Ohio is a leader nationally in election cybersecurity standards and the Ohio Secretary of State continually directs boards of elections to enhance and fortify its security profile. Often these directives are mandatory for the CCBOE to implement.
- Maintenance Projects: The Board's Robert E. Hughes Building needs building maintenance. The four (4) Board Members at the CCBOE are strongly advocating for maintaining the building for the public as well as its employees and are glad to see some improvement items will be addressed in the Major Capital Project Improvement Plan. Beyond the major projects, there is the need for lower cost improvements/maintenance to the building and a modest budget allocation has been requested for these purposes.
- Employee Compensation: The Board engaged in a compensation and classification review process with the Archer Company in 2021. Wage increases to certain job classifications are included in the budget recommendation from Archer's review and additional funding equal to a two-percent cost of living adjustment is included.

Conclusion

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee. I also have with me Deputy Director Tony Kaloger and Fiscal Services Manager Kendra Zusy, who can provide additional budgetary information.

Thank you,

Anthony W. Perlatti, Director