Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Sewell, and members of the U.S. House of Representatives Elections Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the state of our elections and what Ohio is doing to keep moving the ball forward.

Fair elections are the foundation of our democratic republic. They serve to document and certify what Thomas Jefferson called "the consent of the governed," and their integrity is vital to the representative government on which our states and nation have thrived. With integrity comes confidence in the system, and a belief by the electorate that each election had a sure winner and a sure loser.

Integrity and confidence. They go hand in hand. And yet, today our nation faces a crisis of confidence. Republicans and Democrats alike are losing faith in the electoral system. That hasn't always been the case.

You've all likely heard the phrase, "as Ohio goes, so goes the nation". For decades, the Buckeye State served as the nation's bellwether. With that moniker comes intensive scrutiny and attention – the kind of scrutiny and attention that empowered Ohio to implement election protocols that made our state the gold standard.

Over the past two decades, Ohio has never rested on our laurels. The only way to stay ahead of the curve is with innovation. With the crisis of confidence our nation now faces, immediate action is required. So Ohio is stepping up to bat once again with two significant advancements designed to strengthen the public trust.

First, a focus on strengthening election transparency through technology:

More than 60 years ago, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1960 seeking, in part, to prevent acts of voter suppression and discrimination through the retention of paper election records.

The idea was simple: to allow for the scrutiny of election-related records so the public could ensure that lawful votes weren't being altered or stolen. This requirement established a tradition of transparency that served to protect the voting rights of all Americans for decades. The problem, however, lies in the fact that this legislation, written in an analog era, resulted in a patchwork of state and local practices that have not kept pace with modern technology or expectations.

States have done little, if anything, to codify the retention of electronic election records. They lack consistent standards for defining important election data. They've never set

clear guidelines on how and for how long electronic voter data should be stored, or even whether and how it should be disclosed for analysis. These digital records should be used to make our elections more accessible, searchable, and transparent. However, the opposite too often is true.

A comparative analysis with colleagues in other states finds antiquated, inconsistent data retention practices that fall considerably short of the transparency we all expect. In many cases, election officials update their records by erasing or "saving over" old data sets to accommodate limited storage capacity. In other cases, efforts to "clean the rolls" by removing deceased or relocated voters have removed critical data, limiting the ability of researchers to cross-check and validate election outcomes months after the votes are cast and counted. This antiquated, patchwork of procedures does little to inspire confidence in the process and often renders attempts at post-election analysis useless.

As the Secretary of State in one of the nation's biggest political battlegrounds, I'm leading an effort to change this. Working with our state legislature, we have introduced legislation, the DATA Act, that codifies key election data definitions and retention requirements for voter registration data and non-federal election ballots. I'm asking my colleagues in other states to consider using this legislation as a framework for their own reforms. Together, we can adopt uniform standards for retaining and disclosing electronic election data. This is a common sense, bipartisan solution to the growing crisis of confidence in our democracy, and it's long overdue.

Our second new initiative is the Public Integrity Division.

A review of our office's capabilities demonstrated there was room to strengthen our investigative functions far beyond what they were. For too long, questions of election law violations, campaign finance reporting, and more were left to election officials whose primary mission is to execute on a successful election. They weren't trained, nor should they be expected to know how to properly investigate election law violations. Our Public Integrity Division now consolidates our investigative capabilities under one umbrella and is led by a team of investigators who know what to look for, how to look for it, and how to prepare information for prosecutors.

Demonstrating integrity comes with a very direct and positive impact: increased participation in elections thanks to elevated levels of voter confidence. By strengthening investigative capabilities as well as enhancing the transparency of security protocols & outcomes, voters will have greater confidence their vote has value, and the integrity of Ohio's election system is secure.

We have to remember that every vote really matters. Since 2020, 31 different contests have ended in ties across Ohio with many dozens of others coming down to a very small number or even being decided by a single vote. In these cases, a single vote can impact the trajectory of a community. Our renewed focus on integrity will better ensure the will of the people is followed.

In Ohio, where our efforts have maintained the confidence of voters, we're seeing great success. Both in turnout, where the 2022 elections saw the 2nd highest number of voters ever for a midterm election, and in accuracy, where post-election audits once again demonstrated a 99.9 percent accuracy rate.

This is happening because Ohio embraces our role as a laboratory of democracy, always striving to be the best – where it's easy to vote and hard to cheat. That balance is possible, and it's happening in Ohio.

I look forward to your questions.