Notaries Public are responsible for the verification of some of the most important decisions we make in our personal and professional lives. An improper notarization can mean a delay in securing a loan or a vital legal document. That delay can be expensive.

Unfortunately, the Notary Public system in Ohio has proven to be archaic. Imagine 88 different counties in Ohio—all with their own different standards and requirements to obtain a notary public commission. Some require certain educational requirements, some demand a test and some—even well, some don’t require all that much.

Thanks to efforts made under the leadership of Secretary of State Frank LaRose, that has changed. Over the past year, a new system, backed by changes in state law, has been developed which will give Ohio one of the most sophisticated Notary Public systems in the nation. As of Sept. 20, this new system is in effect.

Under the new system, individuals interested in becoming a Notary Public will apply for and renew their commissions directly through the Ohio Secretary of State’s office through our new online portal. This change institutes a single standard with set requirements across all 88 counties.

Of note, this process now includes a background check which will review the applicant’s history for a criminal record. After all, Ohioans deserve to have faith that their notary will have both the skills necessary and the strong character required to execute their vital responsibility. That may sound familiar—in Franklin County, the Columbus Bar Association has required background checks of notary applicants for years; now, however, it is a statewide standard.

Now, let’s imagine a scenario. A recently married servicewoman is down range, serving overseas, it will become a key component of doing business faster and smarter in Ohio. Ohio is just the sixth state in the nation to embrace online notarization.

We’re bringing electronic notarization to Ohio as well. As business has evolved, digital documents are more popular than ever, and paper documents are becoming less and less prevalent. By allowing electronic documents to be signed in the presence of a notary public, we’ll streamline the bureaucracy that can bog down business.

It’s all a part of a notarization system on the cusp of innovation. While change can certainly be hard, it will strengthen our state and improve service to our customers—Ohioans. If you have questions, visit OhioSoS.gov/Notary, or reach out to our office directly at 614-644-4559.

In addition, current and aspiring traditional notaries can contact the Columbus Bar Association, a single point of contact for the required background checks, mandatory classes and test. For additional information about how to obtain a new or renewing notary commission, along with complete class and testing information, visit www.cbalaw.org/notary.