



## March 23, 2020 Memo

**To:** Secretary of State LaRose, Speaker Householder, Minority Leader Sykes, Senate President Obhof, Minority Leader Kenny Yuko, all members of the Ohio General Assembly

**CC:** Statehouse Press Corps

**RE:** Steps to ensure that every eligible Ohioan cast successfully cast a ballot

In the last week, it has become frighteningly clear that Ohio's laws urgently need to be updated so that our election system can be nimble and proactive in the event of unforeseen challenges such as this current pandemic. We need to act *now* to resolve the cluster of problems resulting from the postponement of Ohio's 3/17 in-person primary election. Any reforms in response to the immediate crisis will serve to strengthen and modernize Ohio's elections going forward, making them more flexible and resilient in the process.

Our collective organizations ask for the following immediate actions to ensure that the current primary election can be conducted so that every eligible Ohioan can cast a ballot.

- Make it easy and safe for every eligible Ohio voter who has not yet voted in the current primary election to be able to do so;
- Make sure voting is concluded in sufficient time for governmental entities and other public agencies to meet fiscal and planning deadlines based on the results of issues being decided in the current primary election;
- Adopt the common-sense measures enumerated below to make sure those ballot requests are processed and all ballots are counted;
- Take action to ensure that Ohio has election contingency plans in place and is prepared for future emergencies.

In regards to the current primary, in order to accomplish the goals stated above, state officials should:

- Send a postage prepaid vote by mail application to every eligible voter who has not voted in or requested an absentee ballot for the current primary election;
- Prepay return postage for all absentee ballots;

- Allow absentee voters to designate additional individuals, beyond immediate family members, to drop off or pick up their absentee ballots;
- Require Boards of Elections to contact voters by phone where the number is available in addition to mail notifications to address simple administrative errors on vote by mail applications, such as forgetting to select party affiliation or date-of-birth errors, and ensure that those mistakes are corrected quickly;
- Issue guidance instructing the Boards of Elections to reject rigid, unscientific signature matching requirements which disproportionately deprives, some voters -- particularly seniors, those with disabilities, young voters, and new American voters -- from having their vote by mail ballot cast and counted;
- Allow absentee ballots to be dropped off at any polling location in the proper county on Election Day;
- Allow absentee ballot requests to be made only up until ten days before the election;
- Issue a directive stating that all absentee ballots received by the Board of Elections through the mail up to 10 days after an in-person election must be counted, if there is a postmark on or before election day, or if no postmark is present, recognizing that the post office does not uniformly postmark each and every piece of mail;
- Allow voter registration to continue until 30 days before the date of the rescheduled primary election, as required by state and federal laws;
- Implement a paid advertising campaign that helps direct voters on how to participate in this election.

In addition, we urge the Secretary and/or General Assembly to expedite the implementation of the following urgent reforms:

### **Early In Person Vote and Vote By Mail**

- Allow counties to have more than one Early Vote Center;
- Adopt an online vote by mail application request system so that absentee ballots requests can be processed in a more timely, efficient, and equitable manner in time for the November 2020 election and beyond;
- Allow voters to permanently request vote by mail ballots;
- Require Boards of Elections to uniformly track the number and reasons for vote by mail application request rejections and rejections of absentee ballots cast so that we can continue to make substantive improvements to the system.

## **Poll Workers**

- Increase poll worker pay;
- Include a public service requirement for high school seniors in American government, and allow serving as a poll worker to fulfill such a requirement;
- Allow Ohio college students to serve as poll workers in either their home or college county;
- Allow senior citizen poll workers to work split shifts, when it is safe for them to do so.

## **Emergency Preparedness**

- Thoroughly examine and implement the legislation and/or directives that might be required to allow Ohio's elections to go forward even during a pandemic or other national or state emergency, such as allowing an absentee-only election;
- Allocate emergency funding for supplies and provisions to BOEs in case of emergencies;
- Develop, fund, and implement alternative communication methods with voters--including texts, phone calls, and emails;
- Develop stronger contingency plans, including how officials declare states of emergency and how elections may be postponed. Any such plans need to have a way to ensure transparency, with checks and balances, but also flexibility to allow for immediate action.

## **Accommodations and Education**

- Enact stronger protections for ADA voters, including designated staff at each BOE whose sole job is to provide services to confined voters during elections, and funding to promote the remote ballot marking system for disabled voters;
- Increase funds allocated to public education via advertising and social media campaigns and other outreach to ensure that all Ohioans are equipped with the right information in order to successfully exercise their right to vote.

## **Contacts:**

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Mike Brickner, All Voting is Local (216) 702-3034

Jen Miller, League of Women Voters of Ohio (614) 563-9543

**See the list of signing organizations on the following page.**

## Signed by:

A. Philip Randolph Institute of Ohio,  
Action Together Lakewood Area,  
Action Together Stark,  
ACFAN-Athens County Future Action  
Network,  
All Voting is Local,  
American Promise Ohio,  
America Votes,  
Athens County's Future Action Network,  
Black Lives Matter Cleveland,  
Bold New Democracy,  
Buckeye State Rural,  
Campus Vote Project,  
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists - Ohio  
Region V,  
Columbus Community Bill of Rights,  
Common Cause Ohio,  
Communications Workers of America Dist.  
4,  
Cuyahoga County Progressive Caucus,  
Crooked River Action,  
Disability Rights Ohio,  
Equality Ohio,  
Fair Elections Center,  
Faith In Public Life,  
Freshwater Future,  
GRR (Grass Roots Resistance),  
Hunger Network in Ohio,  
Indivisible CLE,  
Indivisible Columbus District 3,  
Indivisible Grove City,  
Indivisible Ohio District 12,  
Indivisible: OH12 East  
Innovation Ohio,  
IUE-CWA,  
LEAD Ohio,  
League of Women Voters of Ohio,  
Metro West Community Development  
Organization,

Miami Valley Voter Protection Coalition,  
Mobilize the Vote 2020,  
Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition,  
Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates (NOVA),  
Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans  
Educational Fund,  
Ohio Coalition of Labor Union Women,  
Ohio Coalition on Black Civic  
Participation/Ohio Unity Coalition,  
Policy Matters Ohio,  
Ohio Conference of the NAACP  
Ohio Environmental Council,  
Ohio Immigrant Alliance,  
Ohio Indivisible 15,  
Ohio Organizing Collaborative,  
Ohio Voter Fund,  
Ohio Votes,  
Ohio Women with Disabilities Network,  
Ohio Women's Alliance,  
Ohio Progressive Action Leaders (OPAL),  
Ohio Student Association,  
OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist  
Leadership in Ohio,  
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio,  
Progress Hilliard,  
ProgressNEO,  
Single Payer Action Network Ohio,  
Solar United Neighbors,  
Southeast Progressives of Franklin County,  
The Freedom BLOC  
The Ohio Council of Churches,  
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio,  
United Returning Citizens,  
Upper Arlington Progressive Action,  
Valley Voices United for Change,  
Westshore Fair Elections,  
Young Latino Network