April 16, 2020

To: Speaker Householder, Minority Leader Sykes, Senate President Obhof, Minority Leader Kenny Yuko, Members of the Ohio General Assembly
CC: Statehouse Press Corps, Secretary of State LaRose
RE: Permanent Voting Reforms & Emergency Elections Plan

Safeguarding access to the ballot for every eligible Ohio voter is a value that we all share. Ohio's extended primary is still in progress, but it has already offered us valuable lessons, showing what we need to do to ensure future elections are safe, free and fair, even during a pandemic or other crisis. Ohioans are looking to their legislators to act quickly to update election laws to strengthen and expand access to the ballot. Now is the time for us to come together to ensure our boards of elections (BOEs) have the resources required to keep every voter informed and able to successfully cast a ballot that will be counted.

Given that Covid-19 will likely remain a public health threat for the remainder of this year, the Ohio General Assembly must enact legislation so that every registered Ohio voter receives a postage-paid absentee ballot for the August 4 Special and November 3 General Elections this year.

In addition, the following reforms will improve election operations this year and beyond:

1. Allow multiple in-person early voting centers per county, so that voters who must or prefer to vote in person can do so while respecting social distancing guidelines. In the event of a crisis that prevents voting at precinct polling places, these centers should remain open on Election Days.

2. Provide sufficient funding for our 88 county Boards of Election for the educational and physical resources needed to hold a primarily vote-by-mail election if needed.

3. Codify and expand into law the requirement for Boards of Elections to create Election Administration Plans every year, including details on emergency planning, public communications, voter education, allocation of resources such as poll workers and election machines, and public health protections.

4. Make Ohio's Absentee System More Accessible. Allow absentee voters to designate additional individuals, beyond immediate family members, to transport their absentee ballots; allow absentee ballots to be dropped off at any polling location in the proper county on Election Day; count all ballots received up to ten days after Election Day, even if the postmark is missing, and create a permanent absentee list.
5. In addition, the legislature should immediately enact legislation to enable voters to request an absentee ballot online without the need to print and mail an application, for use primarily in years when a regular in-person election is being held.

While these provisions will improve election operations during this current public health threat, the Ohio General Assembly must ensure that Ohio is prepared for future unexpected emergencies by creating an Emergency Elections Task Force that includes the Secretary of State, other State Department heads, and other key stakeholders to make decisions about election administration. Voters and poll workers should not ever have to choose between participating in democracy and risking their health and safety.

Thank you for addressing this urgent issue. For more information, please contact:
Jen Miller, League of Women Voters of Ohio, director@lwvohio.org, 614-563-9543, Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio, cturcer@commonause.org, 614-579-5509, or Camile Wimbish, Ohio Voice, camille@ohvoice.org.

Sincerely,

A. Philip Randolph Institute of Ohio
ACLU of Ohio
Action Together Stark
All On the Line - Ohio
All Voting is Local
America Votes
American Promise Ohio
Athens County’s Future Action Network (ACFAN)
Bold New Democracy
Buckeye State Rural
CAIR-Ohio
Campus Vote Project
Cleveland VOTES
Columbus Community Bill of Rights
Common Cause Ohio
Communications Workers of America D4
Crooked River Action
Cuyahoga County Progressive Caucus
Dayton NAACP Youth Council
Equality Ohio
Fair Elections Center
Faith In Public Life
Get The Vote Out
GRR (Grass Roots Resistance)
Hunger Network in Ohio
Indivisible OH12
Indivisible Ohio District 15
Indivisible: OH12 East (Licking and part of Muskingum Counties)
Innovation Ohio
IUE-CWA
LEAD Ohio
Metro West Community Development Organization
Miami Valley Voter Protection Coalition
National Council of Jewish Women, Columbus Section
National Council of Jewish Women/Cleveland
Northwest Ohio Black Health Coalition
Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans
Ohio Conference of the NAACP
Ohio Environmental Council
Ohio National Organization for Women
Ohio Organizing Collaborative
Ohio Student Association
Ohio Unity Coalition
Ohio Voter Fund
Ohio Votes
Ohio Women's Alliance
OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist Leadership in Ohio
Planned Parenthood
Advocates of Ohio
ProgressNEO
Single Payer Action Network
Ohio State Ohio CLUW
The City of Cleveland, City Council
The Freedom BLOC
The Ohio Council of Churches
Tremont West Development Corporation
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio
Upper Arlington Progressive Action
URGE: Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity
Westshore Fair Elections
Young Latino Network