



August 22, 2019

Secretary of State LaRose and members of the AVR Working Group:

We are very pleased that Senators Manning and Sykes have introduced legislation ([SB 186](#)) to modernize how Ohioans register to vote. Our registration system is inefficient, confusing, and outdated, and we have one of the highest provisional ballot rates in the country. While we are encouraged to see a bill focusing on improving Ohio's voter registration process, there are several changes we'd like to see. These suggested changes include adding "pre-registration" for 16 and 17 year olds, ending the supplemental purge process, and removing political party affiliation language.

The first substantive change that would improve the bill is to allow 16 and 17 year olds to "pre-register" to vote so they are eligible to cast a ballot when they turn 18. This is a simple step that could be included at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) when a learner's permit and/or driver's license is issued. Engaging potential voters at a young age is an innovative way to increase voter participation, not just in the short term but also over a lifetime. Voters who are engaged at an early age are more likely to stay engaged in our democracy.

This bill is also an opportunity to clarify and streamline Ohio's troubled supplemental process. The bill should be amended to clarify that, going forward, purging of voters should only be done if there is direct evidence that a voter's eligibility has changed, either through a notice of death, imprisonment while serving a felony conviction, registering to vote in another state, or filing a change of address out of state. Since addresses will continuously be updated when voters have contact with the BMV, the supplemental process will no longer be necessary or appropriate.

We would also suggest that the timeline for implementation be fourteen months after the bill's passage. The BMV is already submitting voter registration records electronically to the Ohio Secretary of State's office on a daily basis. Several states have been able to successfully implement an automatic voter registration system within that time period or shorter.

Finally, we recommend removing the section pertaining to the designation of a political party from the bill. The focus of this bill is to modernize voter registration; we should not let the additional language about party affiliations distract or delay the passage of this legislation. Inconsistencies in listing party affiliation have been attributed to over 88,000 duplicate registrations in California. Since this is not something that has been asked previously in Ohio, there is likely to be a great deal of confusion and hesitation among voters, and it unnecessarily complicates the opt-out process.

We would be happy to discuss our suggestions in further detail. Feel free to contact Catherine Turcer at (614) 579-5509 or CTurcer@commoncause.org. We look forward to working with you to make this legislation as strong as possible.

Sincerely,

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