



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@commoncause.org, 614-579-5509, or Camile Wimbish, Ohio Voice, camille@ohvoice.org.

Sincerely,

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