



To: Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose
From: The Ohio Voter Rights Coalition Steering Committee
Date: July 2, 2020
Re: Improvements to Absentee Ballot Application Process

Thank you for establishing the Ready for November Task Force. This letter is focused on urgent improvements needed to ensure that voters have the information and access they need to vote absentee.

With COVID-19 a serious threat to so many Ohioans, it is critically important this year to **maximize the number of voters who opt to vote absentee**. This will protect both those who choose to vote by mail, and also -- by reducing the likelihood of unsafe lines and crowds -- those who opt to vote on Election Day. To safeguard ALL Ohio voters, we must make applying for an absentee ballot as simple and straightforward as possible.

While we wholeheartedly support a system for online absentee ballot requests, there are changes that can be made today to make the application process easier and more efficient.

- Create simplified, **user-friendly web pages** for Ohio absentee ballot requests
- Maintain **stable links** to information about ways to apply for an absentee ballot
- Create a **statewide phone number** where voters can request an absentee ballot application as well as a **statewide online absentee application request option**
- Implement a **statewide ballot tracking system** that is easier for voters to find and use
- Seek out and use advice from **voter advocates** on public education and communications needs and materials

User-friendly web pages

If we want more Ohioans to vote absentee, we need to make the application process simple and straightforward. A critical part of that is having a **user-friendly website** where voters can easily request ballots (or ballot applications). The Ohio Secretary of State's website falls short in this regard. Rather than encouraging voters to apply for their absentee ballot, the website in its current format is confusing and complicated and will discourage many voters.

Even though there may be a great deal of information that needs to be included, it is still possible to make an absentee application page that is easy to understand and use. We hope that -- with the safety and health of all Ohio voters and poll workers in mind -- the Secretary of State's office will work quickly to upgrade and simplify its website to make the information online about the process of requesting an absentee ballot/ballot application more intuitive and appealing.

Maintaining stable links

It is important that the Secretary of State's website be a **stable source of information for voters**. We, as voter advocates, try to link to the Secretary of State's website pages as often as possible. We have been disappointed numerous times in the past few months when useful pages we shared with voters were taken down rather than being updated. If the Secretary of State wants to be the definitive source of information on voting and elections in Ohio, it must maintain reliable links that supporting organizations can safely share without worrying that those links will soon lead to the dreaded "Page Not Found."

To give a specific example, during Ohio's extended primary election, the website had a page explaining the **three ways voters could request an absentee ballot application** (1. by printing out and mailing in a form; 2. by calling their county board of elections, or 3. by putting all the necessary information on a regular piece of paper and mailing it in). The page was clear, comprehensive, and enormously useful for voters. We designed graphics that included a link to this page to help voters find the way that worked for them to get their application. Sadly, the page was taken down and to our knowledge has not been replaced with anything similar, despite multiple requests. You can find the broken link [here](#). We can't share the Secretary of State's links with the public if we do not have confidence that they will remain active throughout the election period (and beyond).

Better options for voters without access to a printer and stamps

All voters should be able to make a simple phone call, or fill out a simple form at voteohio.gov, and have an absentee ballot application mailed to them. Currently, a voter without access to a printer and a stamp has limited options when it comes to requesting an absentee ballot. Creating a **statewide phone number** for absentee ballot application request and a **statewide online absentee application request** option would be an immediate and enormous improvement for voters, equalizing access for all Ohioans. It would also allow voter advocate organizations to share ".gov" information statewide without needing county-specific materials and links. This alone could boost absentee voting significantly.

Easy and accessible statewide ballot tracking

While voters can track their absentee ballots by county, finding the right link can be challenging. Establishing a single entry point for ballot tracking would encourage more voters to keep track, and ensure greater accuracy and confidence in the absentee system.

Partner more closely with voter advocates for education and communication materials

Ohio is lucky to have a number of non-partisan organizations that advocate for all voters. We try to see elections from the perspective of the voter and understand the obstacles that can make it challenging or impossible for a voter to participate. The Secretary of State would do well to use us as a resource. Being sure to have an OVRC member in your weekly Ready for November Task Force meeting would be a good start.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. We need to be working with **urgency** to do everything we can to keep the upcoming general election safe and accessible, and promoting absentee voting is surely one of the easiest and most reliable means at our disposal.

If you would like to talk about our concerns or need more information please contact Camille Wimbish from Ohio Voice at camille@ohvoice.org.

Sincerely,

Ohio Voter Rights Coalitions Steering Committee:

Camille Wimbish, Ohio Voice

Jen Miller, League of Women Voters of Ohio

Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio

Ifeolu Claytor, All Voting is Local

Images attached below

Absentee ballot request page, screenshots 1-3 from <https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/absentee-voting/>:

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Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State

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ABSENTEE VOTING

ABSENTEE VOTING BY MAIL | **EARLY IN-PERSON VOTING**

*** INFORMATION NEEDED TO REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT**

You may use the application form prescribed by the Secretary of State ([Form 11-A](#)) or provided to you by your county board of elections to apply for your absentee ballot. If you choose not to use the prescribed form, your written application need not be in any particular format, but it must contain all of the following information:

1. Your name;
2. Your legal signature;
3. The address at which you are registered to vote;
4. Your date of birth;
5. One of the following items showing proof of your identification:
 - o Your Ohio driver's license number (begins with two letters followed by six numbers);
 - o The last four digits of your Social Security number; or
 - o A copy of a current and valid photo identification, a military identification, or a current (within the last 12 months) utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document (other than a notice of voter registration mailed by a board of elections) that shows the voter's name and current address.
6. A statement identifying the election for which you are requesting an absentee ballot;
7. A statement that you are a qualified elector;
8. If the request is for a partisan primary election ballot, your political party affiliation; and
9. If you want the ballot to be mailed to a different address than where you are registered, the address to which you want it mailed.

ABSENTEE VOTING BY MAIL

All Ohio voters whose registration information is up-to-date have the opportunity to vote in any election from the convenience of their own homes by requesting an absentee ballot. Absentee voting has many benefits -- You can vote early, it is convenient, it reduces the chance of lines at the polls on Election Day, and **absentee ballots are the first votes counted on Election Night**. Voters need only fill out and return an application and their absentee ballot will be mailed to them so they may make their selections at their leisure and return their ballot to the board of elections ahead of Election Day.

The deadline to request an absentee ballot is three days before the election in which you want to vote, but voters can submit their application any time. If mailed, absentee ballots must be postmarked by the day before the election in order to be counted. You can also return your absentee ballot in-person to your [county board of elections](#) before the close of the polls at 7:30pm on Election Day. You can request your ballot for each individual election beginning on January 1 or 90 days before the date of an election, whichever is earlier, but you must complete and submit a separate application for each election in which you want to vote. Your request must be received by your local county board of elections by noon the third day before the election (usually a Saturday). However, you should submit your request as far in advance of the election as possible to ensure there is sufficient time for the board to mail you a ballot and for you to timely return that ballot.

STEPS TO REQUEST AND VOTE AN ABSENTEE BALLOT:

1. **Complete the absentee ballot request form***.
2. Once you have completed your application by providing all of the required information **print and sign it**.
3. **Mail the request form back to your own county board of elections.**
4. **Wait to receive your ballot in the mail from your county board of elections.** If you have questions about your absentee ballot request, you should call your [county board of elections](#) or you can track the status of your ballot request as well as your voted absentee ballot through the [Voter Toolkit](#).
5. **Return your voted ballot.** You can send it by **U.S. Mail** or deliver it **in person** to your county board of elections, but the return envelope containing your marked ballot must either be received by your county board of elections prior to the close of the polls on Election Day, or postmarked no later than the day before the election and received by the board of elections no later than 10 days after the election.

To make sure your absentee ballot is counted, it must be received by your board of elections by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day OR be postmarked by the day before Election Day.

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) estimates that it may take two to five days for your voted absentee ballot to be delivered to your board of elections by mail.

If you are returning your voted ballot during the week before Election Day, you should take it to USPS no later than the day before Election Day and ensure it receives a postmark as follows:

- o If you use a postage label purchased at a USPS customer service window or vending machine, the date on the label is the postmark. This is the USPS-recommended way to postmark your ballot.
- o If you use postage stamps, ask that it be postmarked.

You should not use a postage meter or an online service (such as stamps.com) to affix postage.

It is your responsibility to make sure the ballot has enough postage.

If you do not vote your absentee ballot and instead decide to go to your assigned polling place on Election Day, you must vote a provisional ballot.

Note: No voted ballot may be returned to a board of elections by fax or e-mail. If a voted ballot is returned by fax or e-mail, it will not be accepted, processed, or counted.

MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

Note: State and federal law make additional accommodations for military and overseas voters. Please visit www.OhioMilitaryVotes.com for more information

HOSPITALIZED VOTERS

If you or your minor child is in the hospital on Election Day, you must submit a properly-completed and signed request to the board of elections of the county in which your voting residence is located by 3 p.m. on Election Day. To be eligible under this provision, you or your minor child must be confined in a hospital because of an accident or unforeseeable medical emergency. If you or your minor child is hospitalized in the same county where you are registered to vote, two representatives of the board of elections can deliver the ballot to you, wait while you mark the ballot, and return your voted ballot to the board office. Additionally, you may include in your absentee ballot application a request that your county board of elections give your unmarked ballot to a designated relative -- your spouse, father, mother, father-in-law, mother-in-law, grandfather, grandmother, brother, sister, son, daughter, adopted parent, adopted child, stepparent, stepchild, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece -- who shall deliver the ballot to you in the hospital and return your voted ballot to the board office. [Click here for Hospitalized Absentee Ballot Request Form 11-B.](#)

EARLY IN-PERSON VOTING

In Ohio, voters have many options to vote. Starting the day after the close of voter registration, all registered voters may request and vote an absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections or early voting center as designated by the county.

Most Ohio counties provide early voting at their board of elections office. However, the following counties have separate early voting centers:

- **Lucas:** Ohio Means Jobs Building, [1301 Monroe Street, Toledo Ohio 43604](#)
 - **Miami:** Hobart Center for County Government, [510 West Water Street, Troy Ohio 45373](#)
 - **Summit:** SCBOE Early Vote Center, [500 Grant Street, Akron Ohio 44311](#)
- [Click here for Ohio's statewide voting schedule](#) and check with your [county board of elections](#) for more specific information on where to vote.

When you click on “Complete the absentee ballot request form” you get to the page below (<https://www.ohiosos.gov/publications/#abr>):

ELECTIONS PUBLICATIONS



Absentee Voting

- [11-A English Absentee Ballot Request Form \(PDF\)](#)
- [11-A Spanish Absentee Ballot Request Form \(PDF\)](#)

- [Fill out an HTML request form that generates a PDF of the 11-A which you may print and mail to your county board of elections.](#)

Absentee Voting Under Special Circumstances

Military and Overseas Voters

- [Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\) Absentee Ballot Request for Uniformed Service Members, Their Families and Other Overseas U.S. Citizens](#)

- [Application by Relative for Uniformed Services or Overseas Absent Voter's Ballot \(PDF\)](#)

Hospitalized Voters

- [11-B Application for Absent Voter's Ballot by Voter Hospitalized, or Whose Minor Child is Hospitalized, Because of an Accident or Unforeseeable Medical Emergency \(PDF\)](#)
- [11-B-2 Absentee Ballot Application—Voter with a Disability, OUT-OF-COUNTY Hospitalization Due to an Accident or Unforeseeable Medical Emergency That Occurred after 12:00 p.m. \(noon\) on the Saturday before Election Day and before 3:00 p.m. on Election Day \(PDF\)](#)

Voters Requiring Assistance

- [11-F Application for Absent Voter's Ballot by Voter Requiring Assistance \(PDF\)](#)
- [11-G Application for Absentee Voter's Ballot by a Voter with a Qualifying Disability Under the Americans With Disabilities Act & Request to Use a Remote Ballot Marking System \(PDF\)](#)
[Fill out an HTML request form that generates a PDF of the 11-G which you may print and mail to your county board of elections.](#)

[Constitution of the State of Ohio \(Current through: November 2017\) \(PDF\)](#)

[2020 Elections Calendar](#)

[12"x18" \(PDF\)](#)

[HTML](#)

[Elections Statistics](#)

[Forms and Petitions](#)

[Laws of Ohio](#)

[Local Liquor Option Elections, The Guide to \(Last Revised: November 2017\) \(PDF\)](#)

[National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\)](#)

[Designated Agency Manual \(PDF\)](#)

[Department of Job and Family Services Manual \(PDF\)](#)

[Bureau of Motor Vehicles Manual \(PDF\)](#)

[Election Official Manual \(Last Revised: 8/6/2019\)](#)

[Roster of Ohio Officers](#)

[Ohio Ballot Questions and Issues Handbook \(Last Revised: April 2019\) \(PDF\)](#)

Voter Registration

[Register to Vote or Update Your Registration Information Online](#)

[English Voter Registration Form \(PDF\)](#)

[Order a Voter Registration Form - English version](#)

[Spanish Voter Registration Form \(PDF\)](#)