



**State Representative Cindy Abrams**  
***Sponsor Testimony - House Bill 680***  
***House State and Local Government Committee***  
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One of the cornerstones of our democracy is a free and fair election system.

How we conduct our elections is a critical part of giving voters the confidence that the system works and their vote counts.

Any confusion, especially in this age of social media...and in particular in the midst of a presidential election...is a prescription for disaster.

It is vital that decisions about how Ohio conducts elections be made thoughtfully and deliberately, not in the heat of the moment in the midst of a crisis.

That is why we need House Bill 680.

This legislation creates a clear, transparent and unambiguous failsafe plan for conducting Ohio's elections during a public health emergency.

Under the bill, the governor and the director of the Ohio Department of Health may, in the case of a public health emergency and not later than 60 days before an election, jointly recommend to the Ohio General Assembly that the failsafe plan be implemented for the upcoming election.

The legislature would then have three days to adopt, with a simple majority, a joint resolution approving the recommendation. If it does, the failsafe plan goes into effect. If it does not, the election is conducted under existing law, in-person as well as absentee and early voting.

The bill also prohibits state and local health departments from issuing any order, making any rule or taking any action affecting the conduct of an election.

What is the failsafe plan in House Bill 680?

Under the failsafe plan:

- The election would be conducted by mail only and all polling places would be closed.
- The Ohio Secretary of State would mail a postcard to each registered voter notifying them of the procedures to apply for and return absentee ballots, as well as the applicable deadlines.
- If a county elections board determines an absentee ballot application is not valid – perhaps the voter has moved or had a change of name without updating their voter registration – the board would send the applicant a provisional ballot, along with the reason why the applicant is being sent a provisional ballot.
- There would be no in person voting on Election Day, except for homeless and certain handicapped voters, in accordance with federal requirements.
- An elector who submits a timely application for an absentee ballot but whose ballot was lost, stolen, destroyed or defaced may cast a provisional at the county elections board until 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

Additionally, the deadline for absentee ballot applications to be received by the county elections board would be 10 days before the election, to help ensure requests are processed and ballots mailed in a timely manner. Absentee ballots could also be requested in person up until 6 p.m. the Friday before the election.

Finally, the bill outlines the Ohio Secretary of State's use of federal CARES Act funds. Specifically, under House Bill 680, the CARES Act funding would be used:

- To pay for all costs associated with the completion of the March 17 primary;
- To provide a one-time incentive bonus payment to precinct election officials and temporary employees of the boards of elections for the November 3 general election;
- To provide personal protective equipment for election officials and to pay for cleaning and modifying the layout of polling places and the offices of the boards of elections to provide for adequate social distancing;
- To provide equipment to handle increased volumes of mail for the November 3 general election;
- To pay any costs associated with implementing the failsafe voting procedures.
- The funding may not be used to mail absentee ballot request forms.

We do not know what future crises we may face as a state, but we do know this: We have the opportunity – and I would say, obligation – to ensure the rules governing our system of free and fair elections are clear, transparent and unambiguous.

We need a failsafe plan.

I urge your support for House Bill 680 and am happy to answer any questions you may have.