

House State and Local Government Committee
Testimony by Benita Kahn
HB 680 Opponent Testimony

June 3, 2020

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. My name is Benita Kahn from Bexley, Ohio. I have considered the right to vote a core right for many years and always exercise that right. In recent years, I have been active with Indivisible 3 and Ohio Progressive Actions Leaders. Both of these groups consider voting a very important right in this country. We have worked to help Ohio citizens exercise this right, by registering voters and informing voters of the process to vote.

I write to oppose HB 680. As we are all very aware, our March 17 primary was extended and changed to primarily vote by mail. But it is clear that Ohio's revised primary process was messy, chaotic, and confusing -- resulting in nearly 200,000 absentee ballots uncounted, over 5000 in-person votes rejected, and historically low turn-out.

My opposition is based both on the importance of a safe and simple means to vote and my experience during the primary election to reach out to registered voters. Because of the pandemic, I placed phone calls to registered voters in Ohio for many weeks before the extended primary date of April 28th. I was calling to help these voters better understand the new process that had been put in place. What I found was that there was much confusion with the voters I was able to contact. Clearly, they did not understand the purpose of the postcard if they even received it or read it. Further, they did not understand the urgency of the process to timely download, complete and mail the absentee ballot request form (many did not have printers and libraries were closed) or the need to quickly contact the BOE to request that form. But there was no doubt that the individuals I spoke to were very interested in having their voices heard through their vote.

There is no reason to not let registered voters request an absentee ballot form online. And, there is no reason to change the process of sending absentee ballot applications to all registered Ohio voters, it has worked for many general elections. Likewise, there is no reason to make this process more complicated by sending an informational postcard rather than a ballot application to voters, by eliminating the last weekend of early voting, or by prohibiting the Secretary of State from using federal funding to pay return postage for ballot applications and ballots. We will very likely be dealing with a pandemic in November, making voting in person a health risk. The voting process must be simple and safe. HB 680 does not accomplish this.

With valuable lessons learned, we can remedy past mistakes and institute changes critical to protecting our right to vote this November and for years to come. For all these reasons, I oppose HB 680 as currently drafted or as amended if these provisions remain.

Benita Kahn