

Chairman Wiggins, Vice Chairman Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly,

Thank you for allowing us to testify today. Our names are Nicki Bloch, President of the Columbus Section of the National Council of Jewish Women (“NCJW”) and Janyce C. Katz, Esq. Vice President of Advocacy for the Columbus Section of NCJW.

NCJW, an organization that currently has 90,000 members in the USA and 600 in Columbus, Ohio, sees voting as an important tool that must be protected. NCJW’s goals for the over 125 years it has existed have been focused on the improvement of the lives of women, children, families and, of course, men throughout the USA as well as the preservation of the freedom and democracy of this great country.

The right to vote is essential for a democratic system. The right to vote allows people to voice their opinions peacefully as to what policies should be adopted and which individuals should be running or federal, state and local governments. Often the individuals in office and the policies they adopt touch the lives of women, children, families and, of course men. Through the vote, each individual has the right to express an opinion as to who should be making decisions about issues, policies and governance as well voicing approval or disapproval for issues on a ballot.

Some of our members are older and they vote by mail quite often. Others have voted by mail when hospitalized. Still others have children who are soldiers or who have been soldiers and who voted by mail when they were out of the country.

Proposed HB 680, if it passes, will disenfranchise some of our members and many other people as well.

At least ten days before the vote, someone would need to know she is going into the hospital or understand that a crisis would keep her out of town on election day.

Think of someone who goes into the hospital for an emergency operation five days before the vote. She would lose her vote under this law. Is silencing a sick person a great way to protect our democratic system? No.

Proposed HB 680 implies that we would never ever have a situation that would pop up less than sixty days before an election, like a terrible killer pandemic or another type of disaster that would seem to mandate a change in a primary date or a need for a different type of election. The bill says that this disaster should be foreseen and then within three days any change to the election process should be agreed to by the General Assembly.

Of course, this is a most interesting situation. How to determine sixty days ahead of time that there would be a deadly virus or an earthquake or some kind of horrible tornado would tear through the state and make voting difficult to impossible on the set date. Usually, these types of disasters pop up last minute, but maybe somehow a fortune teller could help us predict what will be two months ahead. Or, perhaps, the authors of the bill envision a zoom call with the Almighty to clarify what

will happen sixty days in advance so that voting can be properly take place without disenfranchising anyone. And, of course, if the contingency plan is in place, all voting must be closed and voters can only vote by provisional or absentee ballots.

If the absentee ballot during this contingency process is found to be invalid, the person must be permitted to file a provisional ballot – meaning the person must really, really file that absentee ballot request early to ensure the request is responded to and there is time to file a provisional ballot if needed.

Plus, we have to guarantee that the mail system works better than it has been to make sure all ballots are received and returned by the deadline.

And, in the case of a pandemic that springs up after sixty days and perhaps even after the ten day limit has passed for applications for absentee ballots, voters will need to decide if it is more important to voice their opinion through voting and chance catching the disease or to stay home and let the votes of others control the outcome of the election. Wisconsin citizens faced that issue and some of those who decided to vote, disease or no disease, became COVID-19 victims. Why would any government leader, concerned about the citizens of his/her state, want someone to have to make that choice?

The bill prohibits mailing out an application to receive a ballot to all state residents, but allows a postcard, describing the procedure to get the ballot, in its place. Instead of making the process easier of obtaining an absentee ballot easier, it makes the process more convoluted, almost as if the goal is to limit the votes of individuals who might be older, sicker, not as sophisticated as others.

One would think that in a democratic system, or even a republic, leaders would want to make voting easier so that all people have the opportunity to express their thoughts through their vote. HB680 will make voting more difficult. HB680 could endanger the lives of those who want to vote. Why do we need a bill that would harm citizens, harm our democratic system?

Because this is an anti-democracy bill, we, on behalf of the members of the NCJW in Columbus, Ohio, respectfully request you vote “no” and do not allow this bill to come out of committee.