



The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.

Wednesday, June 3, 2020
House Bill 680: Opposition Testimony
House State and Local Government Committee

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Wensing. I am a high school math teacher with 26 years of experience and I currently serve as Vice President of the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of our 122,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns with House Bill 680. OEA is opposed to this bill as currently written.

Each year, OEA members adopt legislative policies to address issues facing public education and the state as a whole. Through these legislative policies, our members have consistently supported ensuring that we have free and open elections and making sure Ohio's citizens have unencumbered access to participate in our democracy. Our concern is that passage of HB 680 in its current form takes us further from that goal.

The bill would create a contingency procedure that may be used to conduct an election entirely by mail during a public health emergency. Under this circumstance, a voter would still need to request an absentee ballot. In addition, the bill expressly prohibits prepaid postage on absentee applications or the ballots themselves. In a mail-only election, we believe that having to request an absentee ballot is an unnecessary step that could add delay and confusion. If mail is the only means for a citizen to exercise his or her right to vote, every registered voter should be sent a ballot and the state should pay for the return postage. This is would ensure voter access and a truly free election for voters.

Aside from the contingency procedure in the bill, HB 680 makes changes to election law that may serve to limit voter access. The bill shortens the window for requesting an absentee ballot, prohibits the Secretary of State from mailing unsolicited absentee applications in 2020, and prohibits prepaid postage on applications or the ballots themselves. Instead of taking these steps, lawmakers should be looking at ways to make it easier to vote.

Secretary of State LaRose has recommended allowing voters to request absentee ballots online and to have fully paid postage on absentee ballot requests and the ballots themselves. These requests would make the process of absentee voting easier and more accessible for Ohio's citizens. OEA supports these recommendations and believes they represent a better course of action than HB 680 as currently proposed.

As we face uncertain times and a continuing public health crisis, it is vitally important that Ohioans have confidence in our elections. All citizens should be able to exercise their right to vote in ways that are safe and convenient. HB 680 fails to take important steps that would make absentee voting more accessible. Instead, it represents a step in the wrong direction. OEA urges opposition to the bill.

