



# Youngstown Warren Black Caucus

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May 29, 2020

The Honorable Larry Householder  
Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives  
77 South High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Speaker Householder,

The members of the Youngstown Warren chapter of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus are adamantly opposed to the proposed changes in HB 680 as introduced by Rep. Cindy Abrams and urge the General Assembly to defeat this bill. The bill includes provisions that are a disenfranchisement of the rights of African American voters.

HB 680 is an attack on voting rights and voter access. It reverses many hard-fought advancements that have made voting for those living in urban communities like ours simpler and more accessible. The early voting system currently in place is one that has assured members of the African American community that our votes will be counted.

Like many other groups representing people of color, we believe the following must be included in any election reform in our state:

**1) All qualified, registered voters must be mailed an absentee ballot application and pay the return postage.** The postcard mailed in the extended primary election of 2020 caused confusion and did not serve any useful purpose in providing access due to the abrupt decision to close polling places on Election Day. Funds used for postcards should instead be allocated to produce and mail the ballot application to all registered voters to allow them to participate in the general election. The application itself provides clear directions on what information is needed in order to obtain a ballot and will cut out a step for election officials. It is also our understanding that funds have already been allocated in the state budget to mail the application to every registered voter.

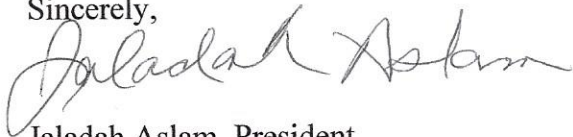
2) **The current election calendar MUST remain the same.** All voters, including overseas and military voters should not lose a week of voting days. Cutting the last three days of early voting will have a particularly negative effect on the African American community. Eliminating the last 3 days of in person early voting is particularly harmful to our Faith community as the Sunday before Election is when thousands of black churches hold “Souls to the Polls” programs and mobilization. Boards of Elections have proven their ability to effectively administer voting under the current election calendar, therefore eliminating these days serve no purpose other than to disenfranchise voters and suppress the vote. The issue was also decided in a major lawsuit with the former Ohio Secretary of State in 2012.

3) **The Secretary of State should provide the cost of postage for the return of all completed ballots by mail.** Given the fact that health officials are predicting a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the fall, many more Ohioans will be voting by mail and need the support of taxpayer dollars in our budget to make that process simpler.

4) **Each County Board of Election should be able to provide more than one secure drop box location for voters to deliver their completed ballot.** Due to the density of population from one county to another as well as the variation in geography, it may be more difficult from some voters to access one secure drop box at the County BOE. By allowing each county to have more than one secure drop box will facilitate greater participation. Especially for those in rural areas.

We urge you to reject HB 680, keep the election calendar as is for the 2020 November election, and implement the changes we are requesting. All Ohio taxpayers want a fair, accessible, secure, and simple electoral process. Local Election and Health Officials should be trusted to make decisions and utilize procedures that work to engage voters, keep them safe while voting and expand opportunities to vote, rather than limit them. Please vote down HB 680! It is a regressive action upon the voting rights of Black Ohioans. Given the current climate in our nation, we do not need any additional harm to our community.

Sincerely,



Jaladah Aslam, President

YWBC

330-727-5758

CC: Minority Leader Emilia Sykes

Ohio State and Local Government Committee Members

Governor Mike DeWine

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose