



Ohio

House State and Local Government Committee
Testimony by Mia Lewis, Common Cause Ohio
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.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mia Lewis and on behalf of Common Cause Ohio, I am here to give testimony in opposition to House Bill 680.

As voter advocates, we had a front row seat to the confusion, frustration, and anger felt across Ohio during our extended primary as voters tried to have their voices heard and were too often thwarted through no fault of their own. We know how difficult the circumstances were, and how heroically the officials at the 88 county boards of elections were working, but the confusion and frustration on the part of ordinary voters were genuine. Now we have an opportunity to learn from that experience, fix problems, and make sure voters don't have to choose between their health and their right to vote. Boards of elections should be given the resources, clarity and tools that they need, rather than facing another impossible situation.

We want to acknowledge that it's important to reaffirm that only the Ohio legislature has the power to set the time and place of elections. But we are afraid that, rather than learning from and fixing problems, many of the provisions in HB 680 would compound difficulties, leading to more trouble for voters and elections officials alike.

In order to protect vulnerable voters such as senior citizens, we all know it will be important to strengthen and support Ohio's robust vote-by-mail system, while at the same time ensuring access to in-person voting. Unfortunately, HB680 would make vote-by-mail much more difficult and challenging, for voters and election officials alike. Here are just a couple of the issues we see with this bill:

- Sending an **informational postcard** instead of an absentee ballot application adds an unnecessary step, complicates and lengthens the voting process for voters, and is burdensome for boards of elections.
- Mailing out an **absentee ballot application** has worked successfully for years and is supported by voters, advocacy groups, elections officials, and the Ohio Secretary of State. Removing the Secretary's ability to send out applications punishes all Ohio voters. It's unclear what advantage for voters is being sought here. Additionally, if Federal funding is available to support pre-paid postage, why prevent it from being used?
- Please note that instead of adding a step, the legislature could **simplify and streamline the absentee ballot application process** by allowing voters to **apply for their ballots online**. This common sense solution would be a win, win, win -- for voters, for elections officials, and for our Ohio budget.
- If you require an **emergency plan** to be put in place almost **two months in advance**, you remove everyone's ability to respond in a voter-friendly way if something occurs closer to election day. Two months is a long time. Who could possibly have predicted, on January 17th, what we would be facing in Ohio in mid-March? Rather than setting up an inflexible barrier, the legislature should work to make sure boards of elections have the resources they need to prepare as soon as possible. Elections take a tremendous amount of advance planning. Making sure Board of Elections have the resources they need and a plan for robust vote-by-mail will position them to be prepared for consequences of the pandemic.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 680. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.