



State Representative Cindy Abrams
Sponsor Testimony - House Bill 680
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
July 21, 2020

Chairman Colley, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 680.

One of the cornerstones of our democracy is a free and fair election system.

How we conduct our elections is a critical part of giving voters the confidence that the system works and their vote counts.

This legislation will safeguard Ohio's elections, ensuring every Ohioan will know how our elections will be run, how they can vote and, most importantly, that their vote will count.

I want to take a moment to walk you through a few of the highlights of this important bill.

First, the bill expressly prohibits any public official from causing an election to be conducted in any way other than the time, place and manner prescribed in state law.

I don't need to remind anyone of the confusion and uncertainty in the final moments before the March 17 primary...and in the days that followed. The bill before you makes clear that the laws of Ohio as enacted by the legislature will govern our elections.

Second...the bill before you permits the Ohio Secretary of State, with Controlling Board approval, to use federal CARES Act funding to mail unsolicited applications for absentee ballots to voters for the November 2020 election.

As you'll recall, a provision in the state budget approved last year authorized the Secretary of State to seek Controlling Board approval to use dollars in the Controlling Board emergency purposes fund to cover the cost of printing and mailing unsolicited applications for absentee voters ballots. This replaces GRF funds with federal money.

We're also giving the Ohio Secretary of State the ability to use CARES Act funding in other ways as well, including to recruit and train precinct election officials.

I really cannot say enough about the important role the approximately 35,000 local precinct workers play in Ohio's elections.

I know in talking with state and local elections officials, recruiting and training poll workers is a major priority to help our elections run smoothly.

Fourth... The bill adjusts the deadline for voters to apply to receive absentee ballots by mail.

Right now, the deadline is three days prior to Election Day. According to information received from the United States Postal Service, this is insufficient to meet their delivery standards.

In working with the Ohio Secretary of State and the Ohio Association of Election Officials, we ultimately landed on setting the deadline at seven days prior to Election Day as a reasonable way to address the issue.

I believe this slight change will allow absentee ballots to be mailed to voters and returned to county elections boards on time; better ensuring ballots will be counted.

A few final points on the bill...

There is nothing in the bill before you that changes in-person early voting the final weekend before Election Day.

In closing... We do not know what future crises we may face as a state, but we do know this: We have the opportunity – and I would say, obligation – to ensure the rules governing our system of free and fair elections are clear, transparent and unambiguous.

As you know, the November general election's quickly approaching. It's important that we get this bill passed and signed into law to ensure our elections are protected.

I urge your support for House Bill 680 and am happy to answer any questions you may have.