

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee House Bill 680

Written Interested Party Testimony Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish

Chairman Colley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written interested party testimony on House Bill 680.

Encouraging voter participation is enshrined in the Cuyahoga County Charter. In fact, our county's charter requires the County Executive "to promote voter participation and access to the ballot in Cuyahoga County by all citizens."

In fulfilling that responsibility, I urge the Government Oversight and Reform Committee to consider additional changes to HB 680 to allow the November election to be as fair and open as possible.

In its original form in the House, the legislation would have significantly rolled back voter participation and access – from canceling the final weekend of in-person early voting to preventing the Secretary of State's Office from mailing absentee ballot applications to all registered voters.

Fortunately, the House stripped out those controversial provisions from HB 680 after immense public pressure. Now, the Senate has an opportunity to remake the bill into legislation truly encouraging more Ohioans to vote through greater access to the ballot.

And the Senate can do that by simply including measures in HB 680 that already are supported by Secretary of State Frank LaRose:

- Pay for postage on the envelopes voters use to return their absentee applications and ballots.
- Allow for and develop an online absentee ballot request for Ohioans to cut down on voter confusion surrounding the early vote process.
- Allow the boards of elections in each county to have more than one location for in-person early voting.

Not only would these provisions help spur voter participation, they would also make voting safer amid the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, these reforms would encourage Ohioans to adopt mail voting by making the process easier and more accessible, thus reducing the amount of people standing at the polls on Election Day. Furthermore, additional locations for in-person early voting would allow for improved social distancing.

The Senate, by supporting these changes, has a real opportunity to enhance voter participation as well as protect Ohioans fighting against a deadly virus.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my perspectives surrounding HB 680.