



**League of Women Voters of Ohio  
Interested Party Testimony  
Jen Miller, Executive Director  
Ohio Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform  
July 21, 2020**

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Craig, and esteemed Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opposition testimony on HB 680 on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

In May 1920, the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association transformed into the League of Women Voters of Ohio. Today, our volunteers register and educate voters and are a significant source of poll workers across Ohio. This testimony is informed by our work in the field as well as our long history of serving Ohio voters.

About 85% of Ohioans tend to wait to vote in person on Election Day, and with high voter participation expected in November, voters, poll workers, and election officials could face extremely long lines as seen in 2004. For those who do not remember, voters crowded into polling locations to escape the inclement weather. In many polling places, there wasn't six inches between voters, let alone six feet. Given that Covid-19 will remain a concern, we cannot bury our head in the sand and allow business as usual. Long lines are always bad for democracy, and long lines during a global pandemic would be a public health threat.

Billed as legislation to contemplate running an election during a public health emergency, HB 680 stops far short of what our state should be doing to protect voters, poll workers, and election officials safer. We should collectively be encouraging record numbers of Ohioans to choose to vote early or absentee, so that voter participation can be spread out and managed safely throughout the entire fall electoral cycle.

As we saw in the primary, voting absentee is unnecessarily complicated and confusing for voters, many of whom don't have printers or may not have postage. Others legitimately thought they had requested a ballot online, when in fact, they had only requested an application. Others were denied their applications for simple clerical errors, such as listing the current date instead of their date of birth. Denied voters found out through the mail and had to start the entire process over again, by mailing in a new application. Others waited weeks for their ballots to come, with many never arriving. We have numerous examples of spouses completing each step at the same time, but only one actually getting the ballot in time to vote. I've heard from countless Ohioans who were forced to sit the election out: rural Ohioans who couldn't make the drive to the County Seat on Election Day, senior citizens who were afraid to be exposed to Covid-19, and one Covid-19 positive voter in quarantine who didn't want to expose others.

Other voters mailed their ballots by the deadline of April 27, but slow mail service meant that they were not received in time to be counted, like the 300+ in Butler County. And still hundreds of other ballots that arrived at the BOE on time but had no postmark and therefore were thrown out. Including in some counties where races or issues were decided by fewer votes than what were thrown out.

Bottom-line: Voters struggled to have their voices heard through our unnecessarily inefficient absentee system. Many voters were cut completely out of the system for no fault of their own. Ohio should be making it more convenient and attractive to vote absentee, not harder.

We are pleased that Secretary LaRose will send absentee applications to all registered Ohio voters. The following would also help facilitate voting absentee:

- Use federal funds to prepay postage for applications and ballots
- Pass SB 191 to allow absentee ballots to be requested online
- Remove the requirement for ballots to be postmarked
- Place multiple, secure drop boxes per county

Early Voting benefits all voters and the entire election system by reducing strain on Election Day, improving poll worker satisfaction and performance, and allowing for greater social distancing. The General Assembly should allow multiple Early Vote Centers per county, which would benefit those living in the rural, suburban, and exurban areas, as well as individuals who may struggle with transportation such as people with disabilities, senior citizens, and low-income Ohioans.

Finally, poll worker recruitment will be extremely difficult this year. We ask this committee to add an amendment to this legislation to expand Youth at the Booth.

I'm happy to answer questions now, and I'd like the opportunity to discuss our concerns and proposed solutions with each of you as well. You may contact me at [director@lwvohio.org](mailto:director@lwvohio.org) or 614-563-9543.