



**League of Women Voters of Ohio
Opposition Testimony by Jen Miller, Executive Director
Ohio Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform
September 22, 2020**

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

While LWVO championed Ohio's no-excuse absentee legislation, but we have also been calling for improvements for several years now, along with Elections Officials. Ohio's vote-by-mail process is like a painfully slow tennis match. A voter requests the absentee application online, the county mails the application to the voter, the voter mails the application back, and then the county processes that request, either sending the voter a ballot or informing the voter by mail that the request was denied. Each leg of this trip adds time and room for human error.

During the 2020 Primary, LWVO and our allies fielded calls, emails, and social media messages from countless frustrated and confused voters. We ask that policymakers learn from these unprecedented challenges faced by voters and Boards of Elections (BOEs) rather than exacerbate them, which HB 680 would do.

As we saw in the primary, this process 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 their ballot in time to vote.

Many didn't know how many stamps were needed, while 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 arduous, inefficient absentee system. Many voters were cut completely out of the system for no fault of their own. By prohibiting the Secretary of State from providing prepaid postage, HB 680 actually exacerbates rather than relieves these issues.

The following reforms will go a long way in improving and encouraging vote-by-mail:

- Send applications to all registered voters for every General Election
- Prepay postage for applications and ballots
- Allow absentee ballots to be requested online
- Change the mail deadline to Election Day
- Remove the requirement for ballots to be postmarked
- Place multiple dropboxes per county
- Create uniform signature matching standards for all counties
- Uniform tracking of rejections of absentee ballot requests and absentee ballots
- Provide better notice to voters who have had their application or ballot denied
- Provide more opportunity to fix problems with the ballot, given that the cure period is only 7 days, but ballots are counted for 10 days after the election

Ohio can and must do better, but this is the wrong direction. 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 or 614-563-9543.