

William P. Coley, II, Chair
Government Oversight and Reform Committee

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Oppose H.B. No. 680

The Governmental Relations Committee serves to connect students within the Ohio State community to our local, state, and federal representatives. This relationship lends us to best represent the opinions of all students at the Ohio State University on issues of great importance, especially surrounding the ability of our students to be civically engaged. As the Director of Governmental Relations Committee at the Ohio State University, which represents over 50,000 students, I strongly testify against the current version of House Bill No. 680.

In the midst of a deadly pandemic, both our students and local Columbus community members should not be forced to choose between their right to vote and their personal health and safety. By shortening both the absentee ballot request deadline and prohibiting public officials from altering the time, place, and manner of the election, our community must choose either to act preemptively through mail-in voting or risk increasing the spread and transmission of COVID-19. While mail-in voting certainly can be a legitimate form of civic engagement, the shortening of the request period, especially this close to a presidential election, would increase public confusion and decrease the number of Ohioans who vote this upcoming November. Additionally, as we continue to monitor the pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that we cannot predict how things will look in the future. Without any further shutdowns, we can estimate that our state will continue to accumulate cases in the coming weeks, and an event like an election would bring crowds of symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals into a select number of confined spaces. To best prevent the spread of COVID-19 while maximizing the number of Ohioans that can vote, public officials must have the power to determine the safest manner of our election.

Furthermore, by prohibiting the Ohio Secretary of State from including prepaid postage on any absentee ballot applications, our government would essentially be requiring constituents to pay for the safest form of voting. This disproportionately impacts students, low-income Ohioans, immunocompromised families, and older voters throughout the state, which would result in needless risks being taken to exercise their right to vote. Civic engagement should never favor certain factions of the population over others, and I implore the committee to consider the costs of this election for everyday Ohioans.

Collectively, we believe House Bill No. 680 would delegitimize this election and disenfranchise many civilians we aim to represent. For the benefit of all in our democracy, we urge the committee to oppose H.B. No. 680. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.