



## **Representatives Bride Rose Sweeney & Michele Lepore-Hagan**

Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 209 (Secure Ballot Drop Boxes)

House Government Oversight Committee

May 4, 2021

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Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, and Members of the Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 209, which would expand access to secure ballot drop boxes for every voter across the State of Ohio. A wide variety of local governments and voting rights groups have voiced support for this idea. No matter where they live, all voters should have the option to physically drop off their ballot in a way that is safe and accessible and with the confidence that their vote counts.

Secure ballot drop boxes allow for absentee ballots to be returned in sealed and signed envelopes. They help avoid long lines at the polls. They provide our constituents with the opportunity to bypass the cost and uncertainty of submitting ballots by mail without return postage paid. Many Boards of Elections have used drop boxes for years without controversy. Providing additional drop boxes would assist with future elections as more and more voters choose to exercise their most fundamental right using Ohio's no fault absentee option.

Currently, drop boxes are limited by the Secretary of State's directive to only one location per county, the local Board of Elections. This limit results in traffic jams and long lines in places like Cuyahoga County, which is only permitted one location for its nearly one million voters. The BOE is located in a central, easily [congested](#) area of downtown Cleveland. On certain days, the line for both early voting and ballot drop off stretched onto the freeway - including both cars and pedestrians. The drop box limitation also presents its own challenges for rural counties, where voters are more likely to have to drive longer distances and have less access to other forms of transportation.

Along with reducing long lines, expanding the number and location of drop boxes will also ensure that voters are able to submit their ballots in accordance with the timelines established by statute. For example, if a voter still has their ballot the day before an election and mails it, then that ballot won't be counted unless it's postmarked (not all mail is) and it arrives less than ten days after the election. Increasing the number of drop boxes alleviates that problem.

House Bill 209 sets a minimum number of drop boxes in each county based on the number of registered voters that reside there. It also requires at least one drop box in each municipality, township, and institution of higher education within a county. Under this legislation, local Boards of Elections would consider the geography, population, and population density of a county and determine where to place drop boxes.

According to the [Stanford-MIT Healthy Election Project](#), 40 states had secure ballot drop boxes available in one or more locations for the 2020 election. Similar laws are already in place in states that are recognized and respected for their electoral systems. For example, in Colorado, which is generally regarded as the safest, most secure place in the nation in which to cast a ballot, voters had access to 368 drop boxes, or one per each 15,000 residents in the 2020 election. Washington State had 450, Utah 160, and Maryland 285. Along with providing approximately one drop box

per 20,000 residents, all these states had one other thing in common: their voter turnout exceeded Ohio's.

According to the national [2020 Survey of the Performance of American Elections](#), the percentage of voters casting absentee ballots grew to 46 percent, more than doubling the fraction from 2016. The share of voters casting ballots on Election Day fell to 28 percent, from 60 percent in 2016. Only about half of the ballots that were mailed to voters were returned by mail. The percentage of ballots returned to drop boxes also increased nationally.

As more Ohioans vote absentee in a post-pandemic world, this legislation can help make Ohio a model for safe and accessible elections. All of us should be able to cast our ballots freely, safely, and equally. My joint sponsor and I stand ready to work with the committee to find the best way to expand drop boxes in Ohio and improve ballot access. We welcome any questions you may have at this time.