

Committee Chair Sharon Ray and other members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the negative impact that SB 293 will have on voters. My name is Debbie Dalke, and I live in Wood County. I've been a member of various voter rights groups for over 10 years, and I was a poll worker for the November election. These experiences allowed me to observe, and to hear people discuss, the barriers they faced when attempting to vote. I've watched people with canes and walkers who were unable to get from their cars to the polling location without stopping to rest. I saw a woman tow an oxygen tank to the voter check-in table and arrive out-of-breath. I watched an elderly spouse struggle to get his wife's wheelchair out of the car so she could vote. During early voting in Lucas County, I observed people stand in line for over 2 hours to vote. Every election, I see evidence that refutes the first part of Secretary LaRose's favorite refrain: In Ohio, it's easy to vote and hard to cheat.

All of you on this committee have voters like those I just mentioned. You have voters for whom it is an ordeal to physically get to their polling location. Almost every year, you betray these voters by making it harder for them to vote. The voters I mentioned would benefit from voting by mail, but you are making that more difficult. You mandated that each county could have only one drop box, regardless of the population of the county. You severely restricted who can return an absentee ballot for another person, and you demanded that anyone who does so must bypass the drop box and go inside the BOE to complete a form. In the bill we are debating today, SB 293, you want to eliminate the 4-day grace period that allows late-arriving ballots to be counted.

As you probably know, voting by mail became popular during COVID. I encountered people who requested an absentee ballot, but weeks later, it hadn't arrived. Some had to request a second one. A student who was attending college in southern Ohio had to drive home to northwest Ohio because her absentee ballot didn't arrive. After voting by mail, some people worry that their ballot won't be delivered on time and go to the polls as a safeguard. These examples illustrate why the 4-day grace period is needed.

After each election, we know the number of people who requested an absentee ballot and we know how many were returned. In 2025 in Wood County, 20,000 requested ballots were not returned. We do not know how many of these ballots were unreturned because the post office didn't deliver them.

Also in Wood County in 2025, 78 mail-in ballots arrived at the BOE during the 4-day grace period. Your bill would reject these ballots. Every vote matters, and this is particularly true for elections with a small number of voters, such as for the school board in my hometown of Bowling Green.

I urge you to vote no on SB 293. Voting should not be reserved for people who can walk with ease and stand for hours to cast a vote. Current law allows ballots from military personnel to arrive up to 4 days after the election. There is no reason this can't remain the law for all voters.