



PROTECTING THE VOTE FOR ALL AMERICANS

December 2, 2020

Hon. William Coley II, Chair
Hon. Matt Huffman, Vice Chair
Hon. Hearcel F. Craig, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform
Ohio State House
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Coley, Vice Chairman Huffman, and Ranking Member Craig:

Fair Elections Center¹ writes to express its support for SB 191, which is scheduled for a hearing before the Committee on Government Oversight and Reform on December 2, 2020. The Center respectfully requests that this letter be entered into the record as written testimony. With top experts anticipating a continued need for social distancing into 2022,² establishing an online absentee ballot request portal would ease the burden on election administrators as they work to meet the increased use of absentee voting and ensure that no voter is disenfranchised due to a backlog in processing paper request forms.

Earlier this year, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislature enacted legislation postponing the state's presidential primary to April 28, 2020 and requiring it to be conducted primarily by mail.³ However, despite mandating vote by mail, the legislation failed to establish an online portal that voters could use to request a mail-in ballot. As a result, many voters faced unnecessary delays in receiving their ballots or did not receive their ballots in time to have them counted, and local boards of elections experienced severe strains on their limited resources.⁴

¹ Fair Elections Center is a national, nonpartisan voting rights and election reform 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to use litigation, education, and advocacy to remove barriers to registration and voting, particularly those disenfranchising underrepresented and marginalized communities, and to improve election administration.

² See Tom Avril, *Anthony Fauci talks with Jefferson doctors about coronavirus vaccines, herd immunity, and how long we'll need masks*, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER (Oct. 15, 2020), <https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/covid19-fauci-vaccine-november-jefferson-masks-social-distance-20201015.html>.

³ 2020 Ohio Laws File 30, Am. Sub. H.B. No. 197

⁴ See, e.g., Stephen Stromberg, *Ohio's election was a mess. It would be a disaster at the national level.*, WASHINGTON POST (May 8, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/05/08/ohios-election-was-mess-it-would-be-disaster-national-level/>; Jason Aubry, *Some primary election ballots won't count due to lack of absentee request*, ABC NEWS 2 WDTN (May 4, 2020),

SB 191 would help prevent these delays in future elections by creating an online portal for voters to request an absentee ballot, thereby also reducing the amount of resources local election boards must dedicate to processing paper applications. Similar systems in use in other states demonstrate this benefit. For example, Wisconsin's electronic request system automatically generates absentee ballot request applications for voters who apply online and have a photo ID on file with their municipal clerk's office.⁵ This system helped Wisconsin election officials process over 2 million absentee ballot request applications for the 2020 General Election. SB 191 would also allow voters to confirm their identity by providing their birthdate and Social Security number, an Ohio driver's license number, or an Ohio identification card number. In this way, the majority of registered Ohio voters will be able to use the online request portal, rather than a mere subset of the electorate who possess driver's licenses or state-issued IDs. **For these reasons, Fair Elections Center strongly urges the Committee to approve SB 191.** Please see our report, [Registering and Voting in the Era of COVID-19](#), for additional recommendations for improving ballot accessibility during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Thank you for allowing Fair Elections Center to share its expertise on this matter and to express its support for SB 191. Should you have any questions, the Center's Counsel, Cecilia Aguilera, can be reached at caguilera@fairelectionscenter.org or (202) 331-0114.

Sincerely,

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<https://www.wdtn.com/news/your-local-election-hq/some-primary-election-ballots-wont-count-due-to-lack-of-absentee-request/>; Darrell Rowland and Rick Rouan, *After a problem-plagued primary, Ohio leaders disagree about November election plan*, OHIO DISPATCH (Apr. 28, 2020), <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20200428/after-problem-plagued-primary-ohio-leaders-disagree-about-november-election-plan>; Meg Cunningham, *'More time would have been helpful': Ohio election officials face ballot issues due to postal service delays*, ABC NEWS (Apr. 24, 2020), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/time-helpful-ohio-election-officials-face-ballot-issues/story?id=70333752>; Lynn Hulsey, *Elections officials say vote-by-mail changes everything*, DAYTON DAILY NEWS (Apr. 16, 2020), <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local-govt--politics/25m-ohioans-seek-ballots-1st-mail-only-election/e59Y1VShXGvIvu2Shk3FSO/>.

⁵ *MyVote Wisconsin: A Guide to the MyVote Wisconsin Website for Voters and Clerks*, WIS. ELECTIONS COMM'N 28 (Sept. 2016), available at <https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/education-training/election-administration-manual>.