



TO: Ohio House of Representatives State and Local Government Committee

FROM: Pastor John Coats, II, Ohio A. Philip Randolph Institute

DATE: June 3, 2020

RE: HB 680

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present opponent testimony to House Bill 680 (“HB680”). My name is Pastor John Coats II, and I serve as the State Religious Affairs Chair for the Ohio A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI).

The A. Philip Randolph Institute is a national organization for African-American trade unionists and community activists, established in 1965 to forge an alliance between the civil rights and labor movements. It has ten chapters across Ohio, including in Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, and has members throughout the state. Our work is focused on voter education, registration, civic engagement, and outreach efforts. During Ohio’s chaotic primary, Ohio APRI worked hard to educate voters about the rules of voting in this all-mail election. We partnered with Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose to conduct radio interviews and town halls to answer voter questions about how to participate in the primary, and we will, no doubt, engage in similar efforts for the November election.

I am testifying today because of the great concern we have to a provision in HB 680 that would eliminate the last weekend of early voting. For years, APRI has participated in a Souls to the Polls program, a strong African American tradition of bringing worshipers to vote after Sunday services. Souls to the Polls is a positive, communal experience that deepens individual commitments to voting, among young and older voters alike. We were alarmed to learn that HB 680 could end Souls to the Polls by eliminating in-person voting the Sunday before Election Day. Make no mistake: this law change would have a disproportionate impact on the African-American community. The Ohio Secretary of State and the Ohio Association of Elections Officials have expressed support¹ for Souls to the Polls, and we find no justifiable reason to end this practice. Please act now so that we can have safe and accessible elections in November.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

¹ Tobias, Andrew. “Ohio House bill would roll back in-person early voting, end statewide mailing of ballot applications for November election.” Cleveland.com, June 2, 2020.
<https://www.cleveland.com/open/2020/06/ohio-house-bill-would-roll-back-in-person-early-voting-bar-statewide-mailing-of-ballot-applications-for-november-election.html>