HB 680 Testimony as Interested Party
Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform
Ohio Senate | July 21, 2020

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Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit this testimony today on behalf of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland in support of the aims of HB 680, but urging that the Committee adopts significant changes to ensure that voting is as accessible to the whole community during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as it would be were there no pandemic.

As our nation and our state continue to manage our way through the pandemic, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland strongly believes no Ohioan should have to choose between their health and exercising their right to vote this November.

Guided by a commitment to public health and our Jewish values, we strongly support policy choices that enable people to vote without subjecting themselves, their neighbors, or election workers to elevated health risks during the pandemic. We want to ensure that the measures you enact provide for healthy election day polling places, enable expanded in-person early voting, and enhance vote-by-mail efforts, as well as to ensuring the ability Ohioans to register to vote. All of this will require a more comprehensive voter outreach and education effort.

We developed a set of policy recommendations to meet these goals through the work of a bi-partisan and ideologically diverse task force of the Community Relations Committee, which the full Committee then adopted unanimously. Those policy recommendations are attached.

I would like to focus on just a few, which we believe are particularly relevant to the critical work of your Committee.

Healthy election day polling places

An emphasis on promoting and enabling access to vote-by-mail and early voting will help mitigate demand for in person voting on election day. Nevertheless, in person voting on election day, to the extent consistent with the needs for maintaining public health, is essential for ensuring that all people can vote. This includes people without internet and mail access, people who need language assistance, people with disabilities and people who prefer to vote in person safely. We encourage you to select voting sites that provide for adequate social distancing and are equipped with sufficient voting machines, ballots, and poll workers. It is also important to recruit and train younger poll workers who are at lower risk during the pandemic.

Expanded in Person Early voting

Early voting options can help reduce long lines, and related risk of exposure on election day, and relieve administrative stress. We urge you to enable expanded early voting days and hours, including evenings and weekends, and we encourage you to add early voting locations in each county.

<u>Measures to ensure the success of Vote-by-Mail</u>

Vote-by-mail is vital way to minimize the risk of exposure for both voter and election workers. It is also a time-tested way to vote that has been use successfully in Ohio for many years, as in many other states, without a pattern of partisan bias or elevated risk of voter fraud. We are grateful that Ohio is already a no excuse vote-by-mail state and applaud Ohio's intention to mail ballot requests to all registered voters. We urge policymakers to consider additional steps to enfranchise all voters while respecting the need for ballot security and the increased administrative needs of expanded vote by mail. , including providing postage paid envelopes for both applications and the ballots themselves, enabling people to request mail ballots online, and providing multiple drop off center for mail ballots in each county.

<u>Voter Registration</u>

Traditional methods for voter registration will no doubt be disrupted by the pandemic. We urge to take steps to ensure that these disruptions do not impact the ability of voters who should be able to cast a ballot to do so. To that end, we ask that you make sure people have the ability to register to vote or update their voter registration despite disruptions in usual outreach efforts and disruptions that are likely to impact the access of Ohioans to governmental offices. We ask you ensure that online voter registration mirrors the current process for mail-in voter registration, including allowing those without a driver's license or state ID**,** to use other legally acceptable documents for verifying their identification electronically, as well as use an electronic signature where signatures are required, and that you ensure that the Secretary of State's office is able to make any necessary enhancements to staffing and processing capacity for online voter registration..

Election Administration: Resources + Public Education and Outreach

Finally, changes to voting and election day procedures in response to the pandemic will require clear communication and outreach to the public, increased administrative demands on election officials to implement changes, and additional resources.

We request that provide sufficient resources undertake a communications and outreach effort to make voters aware of changes to election procedures, protocols, important dates, and locations, to promote early voting and vote by mail as a means for reducing administrative pressures on election day, and to ensure that voters received accurate information related to the election.

We also request that you to provide sufficient additional funding to Boards of Elections for staffing, capital expenses and voter outreach to enable expanded vote-by-mail and early voting and measures to ensure healthy election day voting.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony, and for your commitment to healthy and accessible elections this year, in which our entire community is able to participate in the selection of our leadership and our future. Please adopt these additional measures as part of HB680 to make sure we are able to achieve those goals during the 2020 election.