

**Testimony by Mia Lewis, Common Cause Ohio
On House Bill 680
Before the Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
July 21, 2020**

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mia Lewis and I am here on the behalf of Common Cause Ohio and it's 30,000 members. The right to vote and have our voices heard is fundamental to our representative democracy. But during a pandemic, casting a ballot safely can be a challenge.

In a [recent report](#) submitted to the Ohio Secretary of State, Dr. Norman Robbins estimated that upwards of 43 percent of Ohioans are at high risk of severe outcomes if they contract COVID-19 due to age, underlying medical conditions, or other factors. That's 2.3 million Ohio voters for whom it is particularly dangerous to go out on Election Day to a polling place and cast a ballot.

Clearly, something must be done -- and urgently -- to encourage Ohio voters to make use of another option that has long been available to them: voting absentee. Encouraging voting from home will help eliminate the spread of the virus. Fewer people at the polls on Election Day will reduce lines and crowds and help ensure a safer experience for those who choose to vote in-person, as well as protect poll workers and elections officials.

Does House Bill 680 in its current form help protect Ohio voters? Unfortunately, by prohibiting the Secretary of State from providing prepaid postage for absentee ballot applications and ballots, it makes vote-by-mail harder, rather than easier. This is exactly the opposite of what is needed to keep Ohioans safe.

What is the purpose of this prohibition? What problem does paying for return postage cause, and what problem is solved by making Ohio voters have to go out to buy a stamp during a pandemic?

If the objective is to keep Ohio voters safe, and to ensure safe and secure elections during a pandemic, then I urge you to remove the provision prohibiting prepaid postage and instead amend the bill to support these three easy and effective ways to encourage vote-by-mail:

- Include paid return postage on ballot applications and ballots;
- Allow online applications for absentee ballots;
- Establish additional secure and convenient drop boxes for absentee ballots.

All three are supported by the Ohio Elections Officials Association and the Secretary of State.

By removing what discourages vote-by-mail and adding what encourages it, House Bill 680 can be turned from a bill that harms voters into one that helps keep Ohio voters, poll workers, and elections safe and secure.