OHIO
VOTER RIGHTS
COALITION

March 13, 2020

Dear Governor DeWine and Secretary LaRose:

As Governor and Secretary of State, we know you have the power to address the challenges posed by COVID-19. We appreciate your leadership on this matter and we want to ensure that the primary election is as successful as possible. We suggest the following immediate changes to ensure that Ohioans are able to vote without risking their health or unintentionally causing harm to others:

In-person voting

1. **Extend the hours for early in-person voting**, particularly on Saturday, Sunday and Monday before Election Day.
2. **Strongly encourage state workers** who are not at high-risk of COVID-19 to serve as poll workers, as well as eligible high school and college students.
3. **Provide reimbursement** for all boards of elections to purchase hand sanitizer, spray disinfectant for machines, hand wipes, and portable hand-washing stations. Sanitizing wipes should be placed next to all voting equipment and all areas should be wiped down as each voter leaves.
4. **Require election officials to utilize line management strategies** that keep voters in larger spaces that are not tightly compacted. Post signage in all polling locations asking voters to maintain appropriate distances apart from each other while waiting in line. Mark intervals on the floor with tape to help voters stand appropriate distances from one another. And ensure all voting machines or booths are positioned at least three feet from one another.

Vote by mail
1. **Extend the deadline** to accept all absentee ballots that are received at the board of elections no later than 10 days following the election regardless of the date or evidence of postmark.[1]
2. **Instruct county boards of elections to accept absentee ballot applications with technical errors.** As advocates push voters into vote by mail, far too many applications are rejected for minor issues.[2] County boards should send absentee ballots to any eligible voter who has requested a ballot.

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[1] See Appendix 1.
[2] https://apnews.com/ddfed70e98d79cf0bee49eb1d9fd85b9

3. **Allow voters to return absentee ballots at polling places** in their correct county on Election Day by 7:30 p.m.
4. **Boards of elections should call voters immediately** to fix any larger problems with an absentee ballot request.
5. **Mail absentee ballot applications** to all active voters who have not yet voted.
6. **Educate the public** about these voting changes by authorizing emergency funds for boards of elections to advertise on mass media and other mediums.

We stand ready to help in any way we can, particularly with public education. Our organizations participate in the non-partisan voter hotline, 866-OUR-VOTE. We would make the hotline available to answer questions about these changes and ensure that all voters have the information they need in order to be able to participate in this important election.

Thank you for addressing this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action, All Voting is Local - Ohio, America Votes, Andrew Goodman Foundation, A. Philip Randolph Institute, Campaign Legal Center, Campus Vote Project, Common Cause Ohio, Fair Elections Center, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, League of Women Voters Ohio, Miami Valley Voter Protection Coalition, Ohio Council of Churches, Ohio Voice, Ohio Votes, Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio

Appendix 1

Numbers of ballots lost in November 2018 election from selected counties[3]

Cuyahoga County

Late postmark: 818

547 (or 67%) arrived at BOE by the Friday after Election Day

Illegible postmark or evidencing: 323

No postmark: 129

Franklin County

Late: 758

677 (or 89%) arrived at BOE by the Friday after Election Day

Warren County

After deadline: 177

118 (or 67%) arrived at BOE by Friday after Election Day

Greene County

After deadline: 106

82 (or 77%) arrived by Friday after Election Day

Lake County

After deadline: 149

137 (or 92%) arrived at BOE by Friday after Election Day

Hamilton County

After deadline: 541

Stark County

After deadline: 181

Lorain County

After deadline: 158

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[3] Data was obtained through public records requests to these boards of elections in 2019. Underlying data is available upon request.

Delaware County

After deadline: 210