



## Jon Husted Ohio Secretary of State

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### **DIRECTIVE 2015-02**

February 17, 2015

To: All County Boards of Elections  
Directors, Deputy Directors, and Board Members

Re: Enhancing Voter Access to Public Information

### **BACKGROUND**

A key emphasis for Ohio's election administrators in 2015 must be our preparation for 2016. Offering online voter access to public information – the voter's registration status, assigned voting location, and sample ballot lookup – is increasingly important and expected by the public, particularly in higher turnout federal election years. With increasing numbers of voters casting in-person and by-mail absentee ballots, the public's expectation is that local election officials will provide online access to the status of the voter's application and ballot. Many boards of elections already provide these and other online services to their voters.

This Directive establishes baselines for online voter access to public information that all boards of elections must fully implement no later than September 18, 2015.

For additional information about best practices for online access to voter information, see the Pew Center on the States' *Being Online is Not Enough* reports from [2008](#) and [2011](#).

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

Each board of elections must offer the following minimum look-up tools on its website:

- **Voter Registration Status** – This functionality must allow a voter to identify the address within the county at which the voter is registered to vote. A successful search result must offer a link to the Secretary of State's Online Change of Address system in the event the voter must update the voter's registration address. An unsuccessful search (i.e., the voter cannot be found in the county's voter file) must offer a link both to the voter registration form and the Secretary of State's Online Change of Address system. This search functionality must be available to voters throughout the year. Boards of elections must continue to ensure that registration updates made in the county voter registration system (e.g., new registrations, changes of name, changes of address, etc.) are promptly sent to the Statewide Voter Registration Database.

- Absentee Ballot Status – This functionality must allow all absentee voters in the county to identify the status of his or her absentee ballot from the date of application to the date the ballot was accepted for counting. Specifically, a successful search result must provide the voter with the following information:
  - The date the voter’s absentee application was approved;
  - The date the voter’s approved absentee application was processed by the board of elections (i.e., the date the board of elections mailed the ballot or otherwise issued it);
  - The date the voter’s voted absentee ballot was received by the board of elections; and
  - The date the voter’s voted absentee ballot was accepted for counting (or, if not accepted for counting, the reason it was determined to be ineligible for counting and the deadline by which the voter may correct any deficiency).

This search functionality must be available to voters beginning at least the 45<sup>th</sup> day before an election through the 35<sup>th</sup> day after that same election.

- Polling Place Lookup – This functionality must allow a voter to identify the correct polling place assigned to the voter based upon the address at which the voter is registered to vote. Optional functionality may offer a link to online directions (e.g., Google, MapQuest, etc.) from the voter’s registration address to the address of the correct polling place assigned to the voter. This search functionality must be available to voters throughout the year. Boards of elections must continue to ensure that registration updates made in the county voter registration system (e.g., changes to precinct assignments or changes to polling place locations, addresses, names, etc.) are promptly sent to the Statewide Voter Registration Database.
- Sample Ballot – This functionality must allow a voter to view and print the correct sample ballot assigned to the voter for the upcoming election based upon the address at which the voter is registered to vote. This search functionality must be available to voters beginning the 45<sup>th</sup> day before the election.

### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- Because election information changes from time to time, it is important that each board establish regular intervals by which the information necessary to populate the lookup tools established above is updated. Any change to a voter’s registration information or absentee ballot status must be reflected in the lookup tool each business day. Any changes to the location of a polling place or to a sample ballot must be reflected promptly in the lookup tool.
- Boards of elections must make the necessary arrangements to ensure that the IT infrastructure supporting its website and these lookup tools, as well as the internet “path” to them, are sufficiently robust and stable to support the traffic during peak election periods. Boards of elections should procure the appropriate personnel and resources (e.g.,

county Automatic Data Processing board personnel and other county or elections IT staff, county voter registration system vendor, local internet service provider personnel, etc.) to ensure that the Board's online presence is scaled and supported appropriately to meet presidential-year activity levels.

- The voter information discussed in this Directive is derived from public records as defined in state law. However, each board of elections must take all necessary steps to ensure that industry-standard security protocols for its website and lookup tools are implemented and followed. Boards should procure the appropriate resources (see above) to do so.
- Each board of elections must build its website, and these baseline online voter information access tools, with the end user – the voter – in mind. Each board needs to evaluate the following:
  - Are users easily able to find the correct site when using online search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo!, etc.);
  - Are users easily able to navigate within the board of elections' own website (e.g., are links clearly labeled, is the content organized, and does it use plain language whenever possible); and
  - Is the information easily displayed using various platforms (i.e., PC vs. mobile; iPhone vs. Android; Internet Explorer vs. Chrome)?
- Boards of elections must work to ensure that its website and these baseline online voter information access tools can be accessed effectively and used by voters with disabilities.

If you have any questions concerning this Directive, please contact the Secretary of State's elections counsel assigned to your county at (614) 466-2585.

Sincerely,



Jon Husted