



ADVISORY 2019-08

August 30, 2019

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

Re: Universal Postal Union (“UPU”)

BACKGROUND

This Advisory is to update county boards of elections on the status of the United States’ possible withdrawal from the UPU and the impact a withdrawal may have on Ohio’s Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (“UOCAVA”) voters.

The UPU is a treaty among many nations that facilitates the receipt and delivery of international mail. The UPU also governs the rates that countries charge for international mail. In October 2018, the White House formally announced that President Trump concurred with the State Department’s recommendation that the United States begin the yearlong withdrawal from the UPU. [The official White House statement](#) noted that the State Department will seek to negotiate bilateral and multilateral agreements to resolve the State Department’s identified issues with the UPU. If those negotiations are successful, then White House will rescind the notice of withdrawal, remaining a UPU-member nation.

In order to mitigate possible disruptions in international mail, the State Department and the United States Postal Service continue to work on bilateral agreements to continue mail service as before, but this will be on a country-by-country basis. Additionally, federal partners and Federal Voting Assistance Program (“FVAP”) continue to work to identify solutions to support the 2020 election cycle in the absence of executed agreements.

According to the FVAP Defense Personnel and Family Support Center, the UPU will hold an Extraordinary Congress of its member nations on September 24, 2019 and September 25, 2019 to discuss the United States’ proposals. If an agreement is not reached during that time, then United States will withdraw from the UPU effective October 17, 2019.

International mail service will continue through October 16, 2019. After October 17, 2019, UOCAVA voters participating in the November 5, 2019 General Election may experience a disruption in international mail. Please see the instructions below to help mitigate any disruption of mail service for these voters.

INSTRUCTIONS

Communicating with UOCAVA voters about this issue and its potential impact on the return of absentee ballots is imperative. Although boards of elections may send an absentee ballot to UOCAVA voters via mail, email, or fax, Ohio law prohibits the electronic return of the absentee ballot. Therefore, UOCAVA voters may have to rely on private carriers such as UPS and FedEx to return their ballots, if the United States withdraws from the UPU. The private carrier prices for returning ballots could range from \$10 to \$60 per ballot. The National Association of Secretaries of State (“NASS”) and National Association of Election Directors (“NASED”) are working to determine if a private carrier will reduce certain costs based on a potential UPU withdrawal.

This office will maintain ongoing communication with our federal partners and NASS and NASED regarding this issue. We will continue to provide the boards of elections with updated information.

Military and diplomatic mail may still be a feasible option for certain UOCAVA voters; however, it is unknown how a withdrawal from the UPU will impact these mail services.

Ballots for UOCAVA voters must be printed and ready for use other than in person voting on September 20, 2019.¹ In the meantime, it is critical that all boards of elections communicate with UOCAVA voters about this issue. Please distribute this advisory to all UOCAVA voters for which you have email addresses.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This office will update its [Military and Overseas Voters webpage](#) with relevant information regarding the possible UPU withdrawal as it becomes available. Attached to this Advisory is a letter from FVAP and a suggested draft email that boards may send to UOCAVA voters.

Aaron Locker serves as the Military and Veterans Outreach Coordinator at the Secretary of State’s office and may be contacted at (614) 644-1761 and alocker@ohiosos.gov.

If you have any questions regarding this Advisory, please contact the Secretary of State’s elections attorneys at (614) 728-8789.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State

¹ R.C. 3509.01(B)(1)