



ADVISORY 2020-07

April 17, 2020

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

Re: Processing Absentee Ballot Requests and Ballots

SUMMARY

This Advisory outlines a set of procedures to ensure that all qualified voters are promptly provided ballots for the remainder of the 2020 Primary Election.

INSTRUCTIONS

PART I – PROCESSING ABSENTEE APPLICATIONS AND BALLOTS

Absentee ballot applications must be fulfilled promptly.¹ To assist with the processing and fulfillment of applications, the Secretary of State's Office made funds available for the hiring of temporary staff. Boards should already be using this funding to employ temporary staff to process applications received, absentee ballot packets, and returned mail, and to complete other tasks related to the completion of the 2020 Primary Election. This funding may also be used to acquire any additional vote-by-mail equipment or supplies necessary for processing absentee ballot applications and issuing ballots. Additionally, the funding may be used to purchase personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies. The Secretary of State's Office previously provided guidance for boards to apply for reimbursement of those costs.

At this point, boards should be caught-up and responding within 24 hours to requests for absentee ballots. A board should consider using a printing and mailing vendor to send absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots. The board must clearly outline quality control protocols to the vendor and ensure that voters receive the proper ballot based on the request and the precinct in which the voter resides.

¹ H.B. 197, Section 32(C)(6) and (7).

Each board must also review its supply inventory to ensure the necessary amount of supplies are available to conduct the remainder of this election. Promptly begin ordering or procuring any needed supplies to avoid issues from supply chain delays. Such supplies include, but are not limited to:

- Paper stock and envelopes for the mailing of absentee ballot applications
- Ballot envelopes, including the identification envelope; provisional ballot envelopes; return envelopes; and supply (ballot mailing) envelopes.
- Ballot stock (to print ballots) or printed ballots.
- Ballot instructions and other inserts.
- Postage (on postal meter) – ensure that a sufficient balance is available on the meter, if a postage meter is the board’s method of prepaying postage.
- Voting machine consumables, such as printer paper and other supplies needed for the proper functioning of the equipment.
- Printer consumables, such as toner cartridges, drums, belts, fusers, and waste toner cartridges.
- Mail processing supplies, such as envelope slicers and letter folding machines.
- Necessary Personal Protection Equipment supplies, such as gloves, masks, and hand sanitizer.

Boards of elections must review [Chapter 5, Section 1.06 of the Election Official Manual](#) regarding the processing of absentee ballots received from voters. Beginning the day after the close of voter registration, boards of elections are permitted to scan, but not tabulate, ballots received from voters. This includes opening properly completed identification envelopes, flattening ballot pages, and scanning ballots. Boards are prohibited from tabulating scanned ballots prior to 7:30 p.m. on April 28, 2020.²

PART II – COMMUNICATION WITH UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE (“USPS”)

Every county board of elections should contact the local USPS branch to request mail delivery as early as possible on Saturday, April 25, 2020. Boards must mail absentee ballots to voters who submitted a valid absentee ballot application by the 12:00 noon deadline on April 25, 2020.³ Boards should request the local USPS branch to make an additional mail delivery prior to the 12:00 noon deadline to ensure any properly mailed requests are received in time. Finally, boards should request the USPS to process absentee ballots the same day they are delivered to the local post office branch to expedite delivery time.

To be clear, if a board receives mail on the morning of April 25, 2020, it should be achievable for the board to process applications and mail absentee ballots on the same day. Please be prepared for this quick turnaround of requests so that the final batch of out bound ballots can go out on April 25, 2020 for delivery on April 26 and April 27, 2020.

² [R.C. 3513.21](#).

³ H.B. 197, Section 32(C)(3), (6), and (7).

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

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Frank LaRose". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Frank" and last name "LaRose" clearly distinguishable.

Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State