



OHIO DECIDES 2020: READY FOR NOVEMBER

Small Changes Can Bring Big Improvements for Ohio's Elections in the Fall

Our state was the first to transition how we concluded our primary in response to the global pandemic, and our county boards of elections got it done. It wasn't perfect, but we did what was necessary to protect health and safety and preserve Ohioans' rights as voters. As Ohio continues our fight against COVID-19, the time is now to prepare ourselves for the general election. Our state is a national leader in voter convenience and election integrity. Because we have a fundamentally strong system for voting, we do not require a rewrite of Ohio's election laws, but rather we must act now to improve our existing system. Ohioans have traditionally enjoyed a set of convenient choices for how they want to vote, including four weeks of early voting in-person, four weeks of voting by mail, and convenient in-person voting on Election Day at a location near where they live. We should act now to preserve those choices and deliver an election experience very similar to what we have had for years, while protecting the integrity of our elections and the health of Ohioans.

Through our recent primary election experience, Ohio has learned valuable lessons that can be used to enhance access, security, and confidence in the voting system. Making small changes to current election law will make big improvements which will ensure that we run fair, safe, and accurate elections – and we can do it without any additional state taxpayer dollars. As we make these preparations, it's important to remember that the date of the election is determined by the United States Constitution, and Ohio will not and cannot postpone the November 3 election date. Strengthening our current capabilities must be our priority.

Expanding the Absentee Request Deadline to Allow More Time for Mail Delivery.

The three-day window between requesting a vote-by-mail ballot and election day is logistically impossible, creates a likelihood that voters will not receive their ballot on time, and encourages procrastination. The primary election clearly demonstrated that the United States Postal Service and our County Boards of Elections require more time between the deadline and election day in order to ensure every voter who requests a ballot can get one. A seven-day window is close enough to election day while still providing enough time for mail delivery. The deadline to request a vote-by-mail ballot should be the Tuesday before election day.

Allowing Voters to Request Their Vote-by-Mail Ballot Online. Requiring paper ballot requests doesn't permit Ohioans to use the simple, secure technology we have available for virtually everything else we do. The dead-tree and wet ink request currently required is antiquated, slow, and doesn't meet the expectations of the citizens we serve. Eligible Ohioans can currently register to vote online, and they should be able to request absentee ballots securely online. This step has the added benefit of removing large amounts of physical mail from the postal system, easing the burden on them and allowing faster fulfillment of ballot requests at our county boards of elections.

Empowering County Boards of Elections to Strengthen Infrastructure and Increase Personnel. As vote-by-mail ballots become a more popular option, especially in the wake of the pandemic, our county boards will need to invest in equipment and people. While some equipment is in place thanks to the historic investment made by the legislature two years ago, we need to be ready to handle increased capacity. Federal dollars can be used for temporary personnel and for investment in equipment, such as high-speed scanners, envelope openers, and other mail-handling equipment, to effectively process the increased number of ballots we can expect Ohioans will choose to cast by mail this November.

Use Federal Dollars to Pay Postage on Elections Mail. Ohio has mailed an absentee ballot request to each registered voter in presidential and gubernatorial general elections for nearly a decade. It's time to take our efforts a step further and provide a business reply mail, postage-paid envelope for any voter interested in casting their vote by mail. We should do the same with the return envelopes for vote-by-mail ballots. Federal dollars should be used to cover the cost of postage in 2020.

Greater Flexibility for County Administration of In-Person Voting. With the expected increase in Ohioans choosing to vote-by-mail, it's time to give our county boards of elections more power to determine how best to serve their voters. Whether they choose to consolidate polling locations or not, they know their voters best and can determine the best option to keep people safe while running an accessible election. It's time to reevaluate the requirements placed on boards of elections for the numbers of poll workers and machines required on election day.

More Youth at the Booth. Poll workers are often older retirees who may be less likely to participate on election day this fall. Right now, 17-year old Ohioans are allowed to serve as poll workers, but only if they are seniors in high school. We should remove the school year requirement and expand the pool of potential poll workers seeking to gain the valuable experience of serving on election day.

In-Person August Special Elections Are Unnecessary. While the issues decided during special elections are certainly important, there is no reason they can't be voted on in November. Not only would this save money but would better serve the democratic process by moving these important decisions away from the often single-digit-turnout August election to the November election which always has a much higher participation rate. There is no issue so urgent that it must be decided in August. However, if the legislature decides that counties should conduct August special elections, they should convert them to all vote-by-mail and all costs should be covered by chargebacks to the issue committee seeking placement on the August ballot.

OUTCOME: These enhancements will ensure Ohio voters can cast a ballot in a timely manner, have a safe experience at polling locations that are well-equipped and staffed, and be sure their voice matters in the next election. Ohio must listen to our bipartisan county elections officials, learn from their experience in this primary, and make the small changes necessary to improve the voting experience, keep Ohioans healthy, and our elections secure.