



March 24, 2020

Speaker Larry Householder
Senator Matt Huffman
President Larry Obhof
Minority Leader Emilia Sykes
Minority Leader Kenny Yuko

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear esteemed leaders of the Ohio General Assembly:

On behalf of Ohio's 88 county boards of elections, we write to you to offer comment on SB 294, legislation introduced today to bring Ohio's 2020 presidential primary to a conclusion. While boards of elections agree that the decision to delay the primary was a difficult and unfortunate one, it was also necessary. We were on the front lines of fielding calls from voters, election day workers, and boards of elections staff who saw the potentially devastating effects of voting on March 17th.

Having reviewed SB 294 in great detail, our bipartisan organization, representing the men and women who will be charged with implementing this important legislation, offer these comments:

- 1) Vote by mail is the way to go! It has become increasingly apparent as this week has progressed that the likelihood of in-person voting at any point this spring is minimal. Furthermore, it is ill-advised to force face-to-face contact between voters and election workers. We will comment on this further as it relates to provisional voting.
- 2) April 28th is too soon to conclude the election. Local election officials share no desire to drag out the election one day further than necessary. But in reviewing the requirements of the bill, especially noting its (well-conceived) reliance on mail, there are simply too many steps in the process to allow ample time for voters to receive and vote their ballots in the timeframes allotted. Consider:
 - a. It will take time for the initial mailing from the Secretary of State to reach voters. We have been told that it could take 2-3 weeks under the best of circumstances to produce, proof, and mail this piece and additional time to deliver it to voters.
 - b. The postal service advises that it takes 3-5 days for mail to reach its destination. Based on this information, we have provided below a very realistic timeframe for implementing the bill which culminates on May 19th. We trust it will be useful as you make determinations about deadlines.

- 3) Require the initial mailing from the Secretary of State to be an absentee ballot application and only mail it to voters who have not already cast a ballot. Doing so expedites the voting process and eliminates unnecessary duplicates or inadvertently leading voters to believe they can vote twice.
- 4) Voters should be able to submit provisional ballots through the mail as an alternative to in-person provisional voting at the board or to forcing board staff to have in-person interaction with voters who request assistance. This is a huge safety concern for boards and we strongly urge the legislature to limit any face-to-face interactions between boards and voters. We are only requesting that this be allowed for this specific election due to the sincere safety concerns associated with the normal provisional voting process.
- 5) Voters should be able to correct mistakes on their absentee applications via email or telephone as opposed to the normal process which requires the use of mail . Allowing this to occur greatly speeds up the voting process. This is an especially prevalent issue for primaries as voters frequently forget to designate a party preference on the application. Require boards to develop procedures to ensure that a bipartisan team of election workers validate any changes.
- 6) While supportive of the requirement to procure an absentee ballot receptacle, we would ask that the requirement not be in place until the last week of voting to allow boards to procure and install these devices.
- 7) Ensure that any appropriations can be used for reimbursing boards of elections for costs related to implementing the bill.

We understand the urgency of passing legislation and are happy to offer our association as a resource as you make your decisions. Please feel free to reach out directly to us or to our Executive Director, Aaron Ockerman with any questions. Aaron can be reached at (614) 581-8238.

Sincerely,

Michelle Wilcox, President
Ohio Association of Election Officials
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Lisa Welch, First-Vice President
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Possible timeline for bill implementation

March 27: Legislation enacted

April 9: Mailing goes out from Secretary of State

April 13-15: Voters receive application

April 16-19: Boards begin to receive applications and process them

April 17-20: Boards begin to mail ballots

April 20-23: Voters begin to receive ballots

As you can see, under the most aggressive timeframes available, voters would not begin voting until April 20th. Realistically, that date could be significantly later than that. However, even given the best-case scenario outlined, we would recommend that the election conclude no earlier than May 19th, giving voters 28 days to vote (assuming ballots must be postmarked the day before the election), and understanding that the actual voting period would likely be much shorter.