



# RECOMMENDATIONS TO OHIO BOARDS OF ELECTIONS

on

## PRACTICES TO IMPROVE OHIOANS' ABILITY TO VOTE

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ohio Voter Rights Coalition (OVRC) commends Ohio's Boards of Elections for conducting well-run operations these last few years under exceptionally challenging circumstances. Kudos to the staff of all the BOEs for your hard work and dedication. **Your efforts are appreciated.** OVRC stands ready to support and advocate for you, and we're happy to provide specific suggestions for improvements to enhance what is otherwise an accurate and effective system. Please reach out to us if we can help the public or the local government understand the value of your work, including in local and state budget advocacy.

Below, we put forward recommendations based on our observations and data, encouraging boards of elections to:

- Increase training for Precinct Election Officials (PEOs - aka: poll workers)
- Take action to reduce voter mistakes on provisional ballots
- Require private polling locations to allow poll monitors and campaigners on their property outside the electioneering zone
- Improve polling location accessibility for voters with disabilities and drop box access
- Alleviate delays to absentee ballots
- Improve access to information about the BOE & full election process
- Clarify procedures regarding mass challenges

The nonpartisan [Ohio Voter Rights Coalition \(OVRC\)](#) is a group of voter advocates and good government organizations who believe our democracy is strongest when it includes us all. Like the Boards of Elections (BOEs), OVRC seeks to support voters and ensure that our elections are modern, secure, and accessible to all Ohioans. OVRC has 50 member organizations and is overseen by a steering group composed of: All Voting is Local Ohio, American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, Common Cause Ohio, League of Women Voters Ohio, and Ohio Voice.

Collectively, these groups run a statewide nonpartisan [Election Protection](#) network to assist voters before, during, and after election day. The network is composed of trained volunteers who are on the ground as poll monitors, Peacekeepers, Election Protection personnel, and hotline responders. Given these activities, our groups receive feedback from voters regarding their voting experiences. This includes reports to the 866-OUR-VOTE Election Protection Hotline, responses to a survey of more than 1,600 voters, observations by a corps of volunteers at multiple county BOE Board meetings, feedback from poll workers from various counties, reports from Peacekeepers from counties all over the state, and more. This document compiles those issues for which OVRC has received the most feedback and suggests possible solutions to improve Ohioans' voting experience.

## **OVRC RECOMMENDATIONS**

OVRC recognizes that BOEs have varying approaches and resources, and that many already employ some of the recommendations listed below. Nevertheless, we wanted to highlight these good practices, since we believe they deserve wider review and consideration by all BOEs.

### **1. INCREASE TRAINING FOR PRECINCT ELECTION OFFICIALS (PEOs)**

**ISSUE:** When the OVRC convened poll workers from nine Ohio counties, across the board their greatest desire was for more training. There are significant differences in training practices and requirements across the counties. In addition, there is a significant need to address the changes in election laws pursuant to [HB 458](#) and new directives from 2024. Year after year, we hear directly from voters who are getting wrong instructions or information from poll workers about ID requirements, provisional voting, and more.

Misunderstanding of procedures by PEOs can lead to increased use of provisional ballots, longer lines at the polls, and potential disenfranchisement of some voters. The following are some of the more common problems that can be addressed via training:

- Understanding that the address on an identification (ID) does NOT need to match the voter's registration address.
- PEOs can be made aware that those voters lacking proper ID have the option for free State photo IDs at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) and, if needed, can get assistance obtaining an ID through certain nonprofits such as [VoteRiders](#).
- PEOs are less familiar with the appearance of US Passports, passport cards, State IDs and military IDs. These will be used more often pursuant to HB 458 requirements.

- Some Voting Location Managers (VLMs) are unfamiliar with or intimidated by the provisional ballot process and more in-depth training is needed.
- Voters with disabilities have reported barriers to accessible voting machines because of lack of familiarity by poll workers.
- PEOs reported being unsure of what to do if they encounter an inconsistency between their training versus the VLM's practice at their polling location. What happens in the field may not be what was taught by the BOE. PEOs should be taught how to respond.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Require training before every election for every poll worker. First-time poll workers will benefit from in-depth, in-person training. Veteran and recently returning poll workers might receive a less intensive refresher training that focuses on new aspects due to recent changes in the law. All of the items listed above should be included and addressed in the training. See further scenarios for training in the addendum.
- Additionally, consider adding special emphasis to training on provisional ballots, such as adding a mock PEO-assisting-voter exercise. Consider designating two PEOs per precinct to assist voters who want to complete a provisional ballot.
- Training should more strongly emphasize that VLMs and PEOs need to inform voters that if they lack proper ID, they must cure their ballot within four days, and that to do so, they can apply for and receive an interim ID at the local BMV during the cure period.
- Familiarize PEOs with the various types of volunteers who likely will be outside the electioneering zone, including nonpartisan Election Protection poll monitors and Peacekeepers (people trained to defuse tense situations and conflict). This is in addition to those who may be campaigning.
- Develop a clear chain of command for PEOs on election day to get clarification from a higher-up at the BOE if they are told to do something different from their training.
- Be sure PEOs know not only how to operate voting machines, but are familiar with paper ballots in the event they need to be used at a precinct in lieu of machines (mechanical failures).
- Be sure to include training for assisting voters with disabilities, setting up accommodations and making the voting process as accessible as possible. Trainings should include disability etiquette and accessibility law.
- Make use of training videos for poll workers to augment in-person training, where resources permit.

## 2. REDUCE VOTER MISTAKES ON PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

**ISSUE:** Eligible voters may be disenfranchised if Form [12-B](#) is not completed thoroughly and correctly. Yet in review of several BOE certification meetings around the state, voters continue to make several common mistakes. Thus, it can be inferred that the form is confusing. Common mistakes include:

- A missing or incorrect date of birth
- Putting the present day's date instead of the voter's birthday in Section 2
- Not checking the ID **BOX**, even if the voter did enter their driver's license (DL) or state ID information
- Not adding the DL or state ID information at all
- Adding DL or state ID information in Section 6 instead of Section 5
- Not signing the document in Section 7

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Separately, OVRC submitted a recommendation for a redesign of Form [12-B](#) to the Secretary of State's Office that follows expert guidance on conveying accessible information to voters. Before such a redesign is complete, we recommend the following to mitigate voter confusion:

- Use COLOR to highlight REQUIRED areas.
- Train PEOs to carefully review the form while the voter is still present and check for common errors.
- Consider whether the form is non-compliant if the voter did add a DL or state ID number, but failed to check the box too. If the required ID information is there, it seems excessive to reject for failing to check a box.

## 3. REQUIRE PRIVATE POLLING LOCATIONS TO ALLOW POLL MONITORS & CAMPAIGNERS ON THEIR PROPERTY OUTSIDE THE ELECTIONEERING ZONE

**ISSUE:** Even though the *Election Officials Manual* clearly states that nonpartisan volunteers and campaigners are allowed on-site beyond the 100-foot marked limit outside polling locations, each year, several reports are received of polling locations on private properties refusing to allow such personnel on the property.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Include a requirement to allow campaigning on site in the contract with privately owned polling locations. Some counties include the following provision in their contracts with private polling places to ensure campaigning is allowed:  
*“Facility Occupant agrees and understands that Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3501.30 and 3501.35 permit individuals to campaign for candidates at designated polling places, provided such individuals maintain compliance with ORC 3501.35 at all times. Facility Occupant shall not interfere with any individual’s right to campaign for any candidate on Election Day at the Facility so long as such individual is not in violation of ORC 3501.35. In the event the Facility Occupant believes an individual is in violation of ORC 3501.35, Facility Occupant shall notify precinct election officials or representatives of the Board of its concerns so that precinct election officials or representatives of the Board may address the Facility Occupant’s concerns in a manner consistent with the laws of the State of Ohio.”*
- Make the electioneering line more VISIBLE. Presently, the flags marking the border line are easy to miss. Make the signage and/or flags LARGER. One BOE has painted the line (a 100-foot arc from the entrance) on the tarmac in its parking lot. Not all sites can do this, but this is an example of an elegant solution.

#### **4. IMPROVE POLLING LOCATION ACCESSIBILITY FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES AND DROP BOX ACCESS**

**ISSUE:** Around the state, voters with disabilities reported problems accessing Curbside Voting due to a lack of visible signage that can be seen from inside their vehicles. This problem is exacerbated under the updated drop box guidelines, which make it harder for voters with disabilities, or any Ohioan, to send their ballot with a trusted family member or friend to a local dropbox.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Curbside Voting signage, including the phone number to call inside for assistance, should be more VISIBLE from a vehicle outside of the polling location. Instructions for Curbside Voting posted near any accessible parking spaces will also be helpful. This signage should be marked as a top priority for poll workers to post as the documents are likely newer and may be unfamiliar.
- Make voters aware that they can call ahead of time to request assistance and alert their BOE that they will be curbside voting.
- For voters who call to request curbside voting, BOE staff should be well trained on what they can ask a voter who is requesting accessibility. Voters should not be made to feel they are being evaluated or questioned about their right to vote.
- Utilize well-marked areas separate from Early Voting lines to direct voters returning ballots on behalf of a qualified family member. Provide easy access to

the attestation form, ideally so that they do not need to leave their car. This could be routed through a separate part of the parking lot, or even an adjacent parking lot if permitted. Long lines around Early Voting and drop box usage caused some of the greatest disruption statewide, so solutions to separate voters based on their voting method will help alleviate lines and traffic concerns.

- Provide ways for all voters, and especially those with disabilities, to provide anonymous feedback about accessibility or discrimination at a polling location. This information will help BOEs identify ways to further improve accessibility, and should be shared statewide and with advocates.
- BOEs should proactively develop relationships with their local disability service organizations, such as Centers for Independent Living, so they can provide feedback and assist the BOE with accessibility.

## **5. ALLEVIATE DELAYS TO ABSENTEE BALLOTS**

**ISSUE:** OVRC continues to receive reports of absentee ballots arriving too late to return before the deadline or voters not receiving their ballots at all. We understand that the vagaries of the US postal system are beyond the control of the BOEs, and that universities and colleges have special needs regarding absentee ballots that need to be addressed. However, there are actions that can help alleviate the problem.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- If/when using a vendor to send absentee ballots, ensure that vendors receive the voter's request within 24 hours of the BOE's receipt, with even greater emphasis on fulfilling requests within one week of the request deadline. Require the vendor to mail the ballot to the voter within 24 hours of its receipt.
- Give greater emphasis to the **TRACK YOUR BALLOT** system, especially in the absentee ballot materials sent to the voter.
- Ramp up current public relations efforts regarding absentee ballots. Along with "standard" outlets, consider greater use of podcasts, social media, and local television stations. Be aware that younger populations are not familiar with stamps and the post office. **Track Your Ballot** should be emphasized more via these outlets as well.
- While most post offices prioritize absentee ballots, some—in an effort to be helpful—bypass the cancellation/postmark process. Consider an advance notice to all post offices in the county thanking them for their efforts and advising them that by law it is **CRITICAL** that all absentee ballots must have a dated postmark for those votes to be counted.

- Due to the nature of university/college campus delivery, students often face specific problems with the arrival of mail. OVRC recommends that BOEs communicate early with school administrations in your county to ascertain specific barriers. See the [Mail Voting Guide](#) for more tools campuses can use to improve mail delivery.

## 6. IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE BOE & FULL ELECTION PROCESS

**ISSUE:** All 88 BOEs have public web sites with varying amounts of information. The depth of a site varies widely from county to county. OVRC and others routinely recommend voters access their county BOE for information regarding not just elections, voter registration and deadlines, but also regarding other activities of the Board and the post-election process. In some places, such information is missing or difficult to find.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Make a page listing the names of all candidates, the office they seek, email address and website (if available).
- The actual dates of the monthly Board meetings for the year should be published in early January, with the notice to check beforehand as they may be subject to change.
- BOEs should establish an online sign-up for an automatic **Notifications List** for members of the public who want to be notified via email of an upcoming Board meeting, a change in the date of a Board meeting, and Board press releases.
- Approved/adopted minutes of all past Board meetings should be posted, grouped by year, with the most recent document listed first.
- Results of post-election audits and other post-election reports and data should be posted in a timely manner. Previous election data should be posted for comparison.

## 7. CLARIFY FOR THE PUBLIC MASS CHALLENGE PROCEDURES

**ISSUE:** Ohio BOEs experienced an unprecedented number of mass voter registration challenges in 2024. Much of this was driven by baseless conspiracy theories. These mass challenges have the very real and grave potential of disenfranchising many legitimate voters. Most of the challengers are using databases that have been proven to be unreliable (see the **Addendum** for reference pieces on this topic). Further, they place a huge work and time burden on already overworked BOEs, diverting them from critical priorities. While awaiting future guidance from the Secretary of State, BOEs can do the following to streamline the mass challenge process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Mass challenges relying on insufficient or faulty data are contrary to Ohio law and established rules and procedures and should not be entertained by the BOEs.** Boards already have the authority and, therefore, can and should deny such mass challenges outright, as they often lack proper evidence and use faulty databases, likely sweeping into their net those voters who by law should not be disenfranchised.
- Given that mass challenges are an emerging activity, the BOEs should **make the public more aware of what is required of ANY challenge.** This possibly can be done via a page on each BOE's website, which—again—should note that if challenged, **each voter has the right to be heard individually;** notified by the BOE in advance; and defend their voting status by appearing and testifying, calling witnesses, and being represented by counsel in a public meeting of the BOE. Thus, the public should know that the following scenarios support a BOE's action to not entertain and to deny any mass challenges. Below are scenarios under which challenges can be denied without a hearing:

Under Ohio law, a BOE Director and Deputy Director have the first duty to evaluate the merits of the challenge.<sup>1</sup> In several circumstances, they can dismiss any challenge (individually made or mass-made) as invalid if/when:

- The challenger has not properly used Secretary of State (SOS) [Form 257](#) for EACH challenged voter. The form can only be accepted if the challenger properly completes and affirms it via their signature. The affirmation, per Ohio law and under penalty of election falsification, attests that the challenge is true based on personal knowledge, information, or belief.
- The challenge falls within 30 days before an election
- The challenger is not a valid Ohio voter
- As per Ohio law, challenges made on the following basis **alone** must be rejected:
  - Returned mail or change of address on file in the United States Postal Service's (USPS) National Change of Address (NCOA) database
  - Evidence of a foreclosure action
  - Being listed as "inactive" or "active-confirmation" in the Statewide Voter Registration Database

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<sup>1</sup> Elections Officials Manual, Section 4.15, page 139-141, updated 2/2025.

<https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2025/eom/dir2025-06-ch04.pdf>



In all cases, if the director and deputy director believe that “...even if proven to be true, the reasons alleged would not be sufficient to grant the challenge...,” the challenge must be denied.<sup>2</sup>

- In addition to these scenarios, BOEs should take into account that some groups, such as Ohio Election Integrity Network (OEIN), frequently appear to rely on faulty, outdated lists generated by third-party websites. These lists often fall into one of the categories above, depending on the source of the list. For example, if a list is generated using the NCOA data, it would clearly be insufficient evidence according to requirements set by the Secretary of State (SOS)<sup>3</sup>. Such third-party list sites may include (but are not necessarily limited to) EagleAI, IV3, and True the Vote.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Ohio Voting Rights Coalition and Ohio Boards of Elections are committed to ensuring all eligible Ohioans have accessible, fair elections. OVRC thanks the BOEs for what you do to support voters and run successful elections. OVRC is supportive of the BOE’s important work, and wants to see and support the BOE’s continued success. We hope these specific and practical recommendations are useful to you and ultimately to Ohio’s voters.

Included in the Addendum below are several of our organization’s voter education materials. Many were designed with the assistance of the **Center for Civic Design**, a nonpartisan group that uses research and design to improve the voting experience.

OVRC, in turn, welcomes your feedback, questions, and suggestions on how to better support Ohio voters. OVRC members stand ready to support Ohioans via advocacy for adequate funding for elections at the county, state, and national levels, continued poll worker recruitment and training, assistance in reviewing voter education or poll worker training materials, and more.

Thank you for your review of, and attention to, the recommendations in this document, and once again, for your service to our democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> Elections Officials Manual, Section 4.15, page 140 updated 2/2025.

<https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2025/eom/dir2025-06-ch04.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Elections Officials Manual, Section 4.15, page 141 updated 2/2025.

<https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2025/eom/dir2025-06-ch04.pdf>

## **ADDENDUM**

### **Additional Resources for understanding mass challenges:**

[Report: Understanding the Flawed Data Methodologies Underlying Mass Challenges](#)

[Campaign Legal Center Letter on Mass Challenges](#)

[The Brennan Center & All Voting is Local Guidelines on Voter Challenges](#)

### **TRAINING: Examples of unusual situations election officials may have seen and may see more of in the coming years due to recent law changes. These scenarios could be useful to role-play during PEO training:**

1. A registered Ohio voter brings in a list of 300 voters he claims are wrongfully registered but does not submit a signed Form 257 for each of the 300 voters. This list of 300 voters should not be accepted as a formal challenge.
2. A voter recently naturalized two months before the election. They registered to vote and are legally allowed and properly registered to vote. However, they have not updated their driver's license since it has not expired, so it still bears a "noncitizen" designation. Should a poll worker challenge this voter's right to vote at the polls, they need to provide additional proof of citizenship or vote a provisional ballot and bring proof during the four-day cure period.
3. A voter with a disability that prevents them from entering a polling location drives themselves to their polling place on election day to vote. Because they cannot get out of the car, they will not be able to access curbside voting unless a bystander assists them or they can see a phone number to call from the car to request assistance.
4. A poll worker assists a voter and is confused by the voter's gender identity because their name on their ID and in the poll book does not seem to match the voter's gender identity. All legal requirements to vote are met. See resources for respectfully interacting with transgender and gender non-conforming people [here](#).

## **ACCESSIBLE VOTING RESOURCES**

**Report and sample training slide presentation:** [Training Poll Workers for Accessible Voting: Supporting voters with disabilities at the polling place](#)

[Making Voting Accessible to Voters with Print Disabilities](#) by AAPD and National Disability Rights Network

[10 Accessibility Tips for Getting Out The Vote by RevUP](#)

[Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections](#) by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission

## **VOTER EDUCATION MATERIALS**

*These materials are designed to be customizable and printed in black and white or color. They are used by volunteers and non profit organizations to educate the public about how to vote.*

[Printable, foldable Pocket Guide](#)

[Presentation on Voting](#)

[Tabling Posters \(18x24 in\)](#)

[Tabling Posters \(letter size\)](#)

Personalized Ohio Guide from Center for Civic Design: [How To Design Impactful Voter Education Materials](#)

\*includes customizable Canva templates in multiple languages