

Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates
c/o Jessica Schreiber, Secretary
13515 Shaker Blvd. Ste. 3A
Cleveland, Ohio 44120

June 1, 2020

Dear Chair Wiggam and Members of the House State and Local Government Committee:

My name is Jessica Schreiber. I represent Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates, a grassroots, 501c3, nonpartisan organization. Our mission is to expand voter participation so that all voices are heard in our democracy. NOVA has over 1000 supporters who have registered over 16,000 Ohio voters since 2012. NOVA also conducts voter research led by retired Case Western Reserve and Cleveland State University faculty to maximize voter accessibility for all eligible citizens. Our research has improved local and state election laws. NOVA has testified locally and state-wide to improve voting accessibility and election administration.

On behalf of NOVA, I submit written testimony in opposition HB 680. HB 680 is a bill that goes against everything our organization stands for. HB 680 will make it harder and more complicated for Ohio citizens to exercise their vote. At a time of pandemic, Ohio voters should not have to choose between their health and their vote. This is a nonpartisan issue.

The 2020 primary election was plagued with problems. It was messy, chaotic and confusing with low voter participation. Thousands of vote-by-mail ballots were not counted because of a complicated multi-step process, delays in postal service and slow responses from overburdened county Boards of Elections. None of this was intentional given the emergency circumstances and public health concerns, but we need to learn from the experience.

Secretary of State Frank La Rose and the county Boards of Elections have come up with some thoughtful proposals that would address these problems and help Ohio prepare for the upcoming general election. They include:

- Vote by mail ballot applications mailed to all registered Ohio voters
- Allow online requests for vote-by-mail applications
- Return postage for both vote-by-mail applications and mail-in ballots

- Administrative support to our county Boards of Elections to handle the heavier vote-by-mail load and expanding early voting days to reduce long lines on Election Day

HB 680 flies in the face of the recommendations of our Secretary of State and the concerns of our county election officials. In a backward move, HB 680:

- Makes it more difficult and complicated to apply to vote-by-mail
- Reduces the amount of time allowed for early voting and vote-by-mail notwithstanding problems of overcrowding at polling places and delays in the receipt of vote-by-mail applications and ballots
- Prevents the Secretary of State from using federal funding to pay return postage for ballots and applications despite the inadvisability of health impaired, elderly or financially strapped voters traveling to the post office or stores to purchase stamps

In NOVA's get-out-the-vote efforts, we see first-hand how confusing and frustrating it is for many of our citizens to vote-by-mail. We need to make the process simpler, clearer and more accessible. We support robust efforts to help voters adapt to new ways of voting in Ohio. HB 680 throws more roadblocks in the way of Ohioans trying to vote from home even when doing so is advisable for those (seniors, health impaired) at risk for severe COVID-19 disease.

The harsh, penny-wise and pound foolish restrictions of HB 680 serve no purpose other than to undermine the good faith efforts of our elected Secretary of State to improve Ohio elections, place unnecessary burdens on our county Boards of Elections, and suppress voter participation in Ohio elections.

I strongly urge you to reject HB 680, a bill that will further undermine trust in our government institutions.

Thank you for considering our views.



Secretary, Board of Directors
Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates