



To: Secretary of State Frank LaRose  
RE: Appropriate Safety Measures for In-Person Voting

Aug. 3, 2020

In the upcoming 2020 Presidential elections, millions of Ohioans will choose or need to cast their votes in person, utilizing either the "early vote" or election day option. Since new research suggests that the majority of people who infect others are asymptomatic or "pre-symptomatic", election officials must increase the steps taken to ensure that poll workers and in-person voters are amply protected from infection by apparently healthy voters.

In addition, data from the Kaiser Family Foundation tells us that 40% of Ohio voters, or two out of every five, have medical conditions that may lead to the most severe COVID-19 complications. Those in the most vulnerable groups -- adults with underlying medical conditions, especially seniors, African Americans and Latinx --if infected, are more likely to be hospitalized, to require intensive care, and even to die. Events such as elections, where large numbers of people gather in close proximity indoors, are potentially and particularly dangerous for these vulnerable groups.

Voters who choose to cast their votes in person should not have to choose between staying healthy and exercising their right to vote. Prospective poll workers also need strong assurance that their health will be protected before they sign up. Therefore, we urge Secretary LaRose to add several science-based protective measures, to complement the ones already put in place by the Secretary in Directive 2020-11.

For instance, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) previously ordered that counties at high risk for COVID-19 infection must institute mask wearing and social distancing in "public spaces." That order did not make exceptions for voting spaces converted to public use during the election process. Since levels of infection change from day-to-day and election officials need to plan months in advance, a similar order for polling places during the 2020 General Election is reasonable.

In order to greatly improve the safety of in-person voting for the 2020 General Election, we ask the Secretary of State and ODH to direct all Boards of Election as follows:

1. All voters waiting inside or outside of the polling location must observe rules regarding 6-foot distancing.
2. Polling locations should be required to post signage encouraging those who have any of the underlying conditions (defined by ODH) to ask for "special protection." That protection should include being offered voting outside as well as being given preference in voting order to reduce their indoor exposure time.
3. All poll workers and voters must wear face masks or face shields when inside polling locations. Additionally, disposable masks should be made available to all voters who do not bring their own to the polls. Voters who decline to wear a mask, or who cannot wear one for health reasons, or who request voting outside the polling location should be escorted to an out-door or separate, isolated area of the voting location, and be allowed to complete their voting process there. In this regard, Ohio's existing rules on assisting voting in cars for those with disabilities could be extended and streamlined to "drive through" arrangements.
4. Voters should be required to wash hands or use hand-sanitizer when entering and when leaving the polling location.
5. Plastic barriers must be erected at any poll worker station where more than 1-minute interactions between poll workers and voters are expected.
6. Indoor polling places must be well ventilated or well-filtered if supplied by recirculating air.

This year, most voters will probably choose to vote by mail. Given the current surging rates of COVID-19 infection, that is undoubtedly the safest choice. For that reason, voting by mail should be strongly, publicly and constantly recommended and encouraged by every means and through every outlet available.

The next safest choice is to take advantage of early voting. Polling places open on early voting dates before November 3<sup>rd</sup>, can be expected to experience lower voter traffic than on election day itself, particularly if votes are cast at "slow times" on those dates. For those choosing to or needing to vote in person, this second option should be encouraged just as strongly as voting by mail, since potential exposure to the virus is diminished by shorter waiting times.

Hopefully, these modest suggestions will assist the Secretary's efforts to craft the most effective means of keeping Ohio voters safe, as he attempts to limit the risk of exposure to COVID-19, while facilitating the exercise of one of our nation's most sacred rights during this critical time in our history.

Signed below by more than 200 medical professionals, as detailed, over 45 voter advocate and allied organizations, and more than 35 faith leaders.

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Cleveland

Kathy Wright, PhD, RN  
Geriatrics  
Assistant Professor  
Ohio State University College of Nursing  
Powell

Theodore Wymyslo, MD  
Family Medicine  
Gahanna

Eric M. Yasinow, MD  
Internal Medicine  
University Hospitals Cleveland Medical  
Center  
Cleveland

Kristine Yoder, PhD  
Virology  
Associate Professor  
Ohio State University College of Medicine  
Hilliard

Hazel Young, MD  
Radiology  
Assistant professor  
University Hospitals Cleveland Medical  
Center  
Cleveland

## **Voting Rights and allied organizations signatories**

100 Black Men of Cleveland, Inc  
4th District of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc  
ACLU of Ohio  
Action Together Stark  
All Voting is Local  
Alpha Omega Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.  
America Votes  
APRI OHIO  
Citizens Alliance for Secure Elections (CASE-Ohio)  
CLEConsultingfirm.com  
Cleveland Alumni Chapter  
Columbus Consulting  
Common Cause Ohio  
Cooper & Elliott  
Equality Ohio  
The Freedom BLOC  
Friedman and Gilbert  
Gamma Alpha Sigma  
Get The Vote Out  
Greater Cleveland Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc  
Greene County Coalition for Compassionate Justice  
Hardlines Design Company  
Indivisible OH 12  
Kaleidoscope Youth Center  
Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated  
Land-Grant Brewing Company  
League of Women Voters of Ohio  
Mobilize the Vote 2020  
NAACP Ohio  
Norman S. Minor Bar Association  
Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates (NOVA)  
Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund  
Ohio Citizen Action  
Ohio Clinicians for Climate Action  
Ohio Consumers Power Alliance  
Ohio Council of Churches  
Ohio Farmers Union  
Ohio Voter Rights Coalition  
Ohio Women's Alliance  
PAST Foundation  
Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.  
Sigma Gamma Rho  
Stonewall Columbus  
Thrive Ohio  
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio  
Young Latino Network

## Faith Leaders signatories

Rev. Dr. Tim Ahrens, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Columbus  
Blyth Barnow, Faith in Public Life, Pickerington  
Fr. David R Bruning, Our Lady of Lourdes Toledo  
Rev. Richard A. Burnett, Trinity Episcopal Church, Columbus  
Rev. Dr. Julie A Carmean, United Methodist Church , Delaware  
Rev. Dan Clark, Faith in Public Life, Newark  
Jackie Congedo, Jewish Community Relations Council of Cincinnati  
Regional Elder Tyrone Eugene Fisher, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Solon  
Rev. Cyndy Garn, Worthington United Methodist Church  
Pastor Jeffrey B Gamblee, Unitarian Universalist, Westerville  
Rev. Mary E Grigolia, Oberlin Unitarian Universalist Fellowship & Olmsted Unitarian Universalist Church, Olmsted  
Michele Kaminsky, National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland  
Rev. Dr. Jefferey P. Kee, New Faith Baptist Church, Columbus  
Rev. John Keeny, King Avenue United Methodist Church , Columbus  
Rev. Kellie Kelly, Miami Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Dayton (Washington Township)  
Joel King, Baptist Pastors Conference, Gahanna  
Pastor Joshua Lawson, Evangelical United Church of Christ , Scioto County  
Timothy E Liggins, Bethel AME Church, Columbus  
Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, First Congregational UCC of Wellington  
Rev. Meg Mathieson, SouthWest Unitarian Universalist Church, North Royalton  
Rev. Dr. Amariah McIntosh, Phillips Temple CME Church, Toledo  
Ariel Miller, Becoming Beloved Community Leadership Team, Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio , Cincinnati  
Associate Pastor W. Colleen Ogle, King United Methodist Church, Columbus  
Rev. Dr. Kevin Orr, Westgate United Methodist, Columbus  
Elder Larry Price, Triedstone Baptist Church, Columbus  
Rev. Steven Putka, United Methodist Church, Dublin  
Elaina Ramsey, Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice  
Rev. Dr. J. Roger Skelley-Watts, United Methodist East Ohio Conference, Vermillion, Huron, & Erie Counties  
Pastor Brandi Slaughter, Ohio Council of Churches  
Rev. Lynda Smith, Retired Unitarian Universalist, Columbus  
Chaplain Paul Sittason Stark, Heidelberg University, Tiffin  
Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr., Ohio Council of Churches  
Pastor Dale D Tucker, Sr., Triedstone Missionary Baptist Church, Lewis Center  
Rev Joan VanBecelaere, North Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Lewis Center  
Rev. Terry Williams, Orchard Hill United Church of Christ , Chillicothe  
Dr. C. Dexter Wise III, Faith Ministries Church, Columbus