

November 15, 2016

Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted
Ohio Governor John Kasich
Speaker of the House Cliff Rosenberger
Senate President Keith Faber

Re: Recommendations for future elections

Dear elected leaders,

Another election has concluded, and with it comes the opportunity to identify where Ohio can increase access to the ballot. Throughout the election period, the ACLU of Ohio fielded numerous calls from voters who experienced problems or had questions about the voting process. The following recommendations stem from the overall trends we saw in the November 2016 presidential election:

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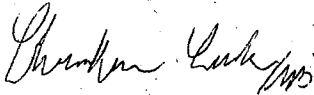


- **Allow multiple locations for early voting.** In-person early voting has become increasingly popular in recent years, with counties both large and small reporting record breaking turnout in 2016. State law only allows one early voting site per county, which makes early in-person voting unnecessarily difficult for many working Ohioans who might be required to travel across a county to vote. Allowing multiple early voting locations would help alleviate long lines voters experienced and would also increase turnout if sites were located in prominent, accessible places.
- **Improve communication on absentee ballots.** One persistent issue that voters reported was requesting an absentee ballot but never receiving it in the mail or waiting an excessively long period for it to be delivered. The Secretary of State's office already allows voters to track their absentee ballot requests, and could improve this service by automatically emailing and/or texting voters updates on their ballot's status. Increased communication can better empower voters to proactively address issues with their absentee ballot rather than waiting until the last minute.
- **Reduce use of provisional ballots.** Large numbers of voters reported having to cast provisional ballots, even though they were eligible voters and provided acceptable identification. Provisional ballots should be a last resort for voters, but poll workers sometimes rely too heavily on them in instances where a voter should be allowed to cast a regular ballot. One common reason we have heard is confusion over acceptable identification. Additionally, many poll workers continue to be confused over the provisional ballot process in general, leading to mistakes and frustration among voters.

- **Ensure accessibility for voters with disabilities.** People with disabilities face unique obstacles when casting their ballots, but technology can be a major asset toward opening the doors to accessible voting. In particular, Ohio will unveil a new online voter registration system in 2017, which could be of particular use to voters with disabilities who cannot travel to their local board of elections or other government office to register to vote. However, the website must be accessible for voters to be able to fully use it, and a 2015 assessment by the Center for Accessible Technology found that Ohio's website failed most accessibility standards. The website must be updated before online voter registration begins in 2017, and the General Assembly should require that all future websites must be fully accessible.
- **Allow split shifts for poll workers.** Citizens who work at polling places on Election Day must fulfill arduous 14 hour plus days that exhaust and challenge them. Oftentimes, it is poll worker error that leads to disenfranchisement, and the likelihood of mistakes happening can increase as a shift continues on. Additionally, many people who would like to work the polls are either unable or unwilling to commit to these long shifts. Allowing split shifts would increase the ability of boards of elections to recruit quality poll workers and ensure that they do not burn out during Election Day.
- **Provide postage paid envelopes for absentee requests and ballots.** Postage can be an obstacle for many Ohioans who attempt to cast their vote by mail. While the actual cost of a few stamps is not exorbitant, it can be a barrier for working Ohioans who live on a fixed income. Additionally, obtaining the postage often requires voters to make extra trips to the post office. Lastly, some voters affix insufficient postage to their absentee ballots, meaning delivery of the ballot could be in jeopardy. It would be simpler and more convenient for voters to have a postage paid envelope for both their requests and ballots when voting absentee.

We believe these reforms are sensible and should garner bi-partisan support among elected officials. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at (216) 472-2220.

Sincerely,



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