

Early voting eliminated on Sundays across Ohio

By Sharon Coolidge; 11:01 p.m. EST February 25, 2014



(Photo: The Enquirer/Tony Jones)

Ohio voters this year will not be able to cast votes at boards of elections on Sundays – and that has some Democrats angered across the state.

Voters will still be able to cast ballots weekdays and two Saturdays in the four weeks before Election Day under a directive issued Tuesday by Republican Secretary of State Jon Husted. They'll also be able to cast early ballots by mail.

But to Hamilton County Board of Elections Chairman Tim Burke, who is also the county's Democratic Party chairman, Sunday voting is "critical."

"On the Sunday before the 2012 election, our board of elections was virtually surrounded by people waiting for three and more hours to vote," he said. "It was a clear demonstration of why preserving Sunday hours, especially in our large urban counties, is critical."

Board of elections records show 24,151 people voted early and in-person in the 2012 general election. Of those, 1,142 cast ballots on the Sunday before early voting – or 4.7 percent of all early votes that year.

Overall, though, Sunday voters amounted to 0.27 percent of Hamilton County voters that year.

Early voting was permitted on two Sundays in 2010, with 296 Hamilton County voters taking advantage of the weekend day.

"In 2014, absentee voters will have the option of voting in person for four weeks, or they can vote without ever leaving home by completing the absentee ballot request form we will be sending all voters," Husted said. "Our goal is to ... ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity in the voting process no matter which method they choose."

Since elected, Husted has pushed for statewide uniform days and hours.

The new rules come in the wake of two bills signed last week that some Democrats say restrict voting. Specifically the bills eliminate a week of early voting and restrict who can send out absentee ballots.

They also come four days after Husted voted to allow the Hamilton County Board of Elections to move to Mount Airy, which Democrats have criticized as being too far from the county's transportation hub.

Going forward, elections boards will be open for voting 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the last two Saturdays before the election.

In Hamilton County, that's actually an extra hour of voting on weekdays. In prior elections the board of elections closed at 4 p.m. weekdays.

Husted is running for re-election against Democratic state Sen. Nina Turner of Cleveland, who disagrees with the directive.

"There is no justification for arbitrarily denying the vast majority of Ohio voters' access to open polling places," Turner said. "As secretary of state, I will work to expand the voice of working families, not limit it."

Husted's spokeswoman, Maggie Ostrowski, noted that, of the 1.8 million people who voted early in 2012, only about a third voted in person. And every registered voter this year will be getting an absentee ballot application in the mail, she noted.

State Rep. Matt Huffman, R-Lima, in a General Assembly committee discussion this month about early voting, dismissed Sunday voting. "There's that group of people who say, 'I'm only voting if someone drives me down after church on Sunday.' ... Really? Is that the person we need to cater to when we're making public policy about elections?" Huffman said. "A lot of those people would have voted anyway, except they waited till Sunday because it's convenient for them."

An Enquirer assessment of voting the Sunday before the 2012 general election deemed early weekend voting "a big winner." People stood in two- to four-hour lines outside the Hamilton County Board of Elections in rainy, chilly weather. The line stretched down a stairway in the elections board building in eastern Downtown, ran out the door and down a block on Broadway, turned the corner onto Reedy Street for another block and finally looped onto Eggleston Avenue, The Enquirer reported.

On both days the crowd of voters was overwhelmingly African-American and very heavily Democratic – the same as in 2008, when about 90,000 people voted throughout Ohio on the final weekend before Election Day.

Early voting in 2012 didn't come without a fight. The Republican-controlled General Assembly eliminated early weekend voting. But the Obama campaign, the Democratic National Committee and the state Democratic Party went to court, where early in-person voting was restored for the final Saturday through Monday before Election Day. |

Staff writer Chrissie Thompson contributed.

Early in-person voting times

Primary election: May 6

- Tuesday, April 1, through Friday, April 4: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Monday, April 7 (last day of voter registration): 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Tuesday, April 8, through Friday, April 11: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Monday, April 14, through Friday, May 2: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Saturday, May 3: 8 a.m. to noon.

General election: Nov. 4

- Tuesday, Oct. 7, through Friday, Oct. 10: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Tuesday, Oct. 14, through Friday, Oct. 17: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Monday, Oct. 20 through Friday, Oct. 24: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 25: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Monday, Oct. 27, through Friday, Oct. 31: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Saturday, Nov. 1: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Source: Ohio Secretary of State's Office, Associated Press research

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