



August 7, 2014

Jon Husted
Ohio Secretary of State
180 East Broad St, 16th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

RE: Voting Access for People with Disabilities

Dear Secretary Husted:

We are writing to request that your office take necessary steps to ensure all polling locations in the State of Ohio are in compliance with the most current standards prescribed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The *Columbus Dispatch* recently reported that the Franklin County Board of Elections moved 79 polling places to comply with accessibility standards for voters with disabilities¹. The Franklin County Board of Elections uncovered these issues after conducting an assessment of all polling locations using the updated polling place accessibility checklist revised by your office in June 2013 (the "2013 checklist"). The changes made to voting locations affect approximately 15 percent of the voters in Ohio's second most populous county². We are concerned that the barriers that were identified in such alarming numbers in Franklin County are present but unacknowledged in other parts of the state.

In 2012, your office issued Directive 2012-09 requiring that all county boards of elections verify their compliance with ADA accessibility standards (the "2012 checklist"). This was an important effort toward ensuring equal access to political participation for all Ohioans. While the directive established procedures for verifying and communicating compliance to your office, it did not require counties to assess compliance with the most up-to-date standards. As a result, while Franklin County is assessing its polling places with the 2013 checklist, others may be relying upon the incomplete checklist from 2012. Voter access should not depend on one's county of residence.

Differences between the 2012 and 2013 checklists are substantial. The 2013 checklist includes more specific requirements that impact access to parking spaces, approach areas, elevators, lifts and doorways for voters with disabilities.

¹"79 polling places moved in Franklin County for better disability access" *The Columbus Dispatch* April 18, 2014 <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2014/04/18/for-access-79-polling-places-out.html>

²Ibid

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Some of these requirements include:

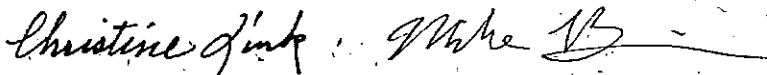
- access to parking aisles for wheelchair users or those who use an accessible van for transportation;
- better and more visible signage for accessible parking spaces;
- stronger requirements for the width and incline of curbs, in order to improve access and safety for wheelchair users;
- increased use of handrails for voters with mobility issues or who may need extra stability;
- wider doors that comply with access standards for wheelchairs; and,
- stronger space requirements for elevators, as well as requirements for elevators to have Braille or tactile buttons for blind voters.

These are just a few of the 54 important additions made between the 2012 and 2013 checklists. Improvements to the 2013 checklist were substantial enough to cause Franklin County to relocate over 15 percent of its polling places because they no longer complied with the more accurate standards for accessibility.

With the approaching gubernatorial elections in Ohio, we urge your office to issue a new directive requiring all counties to conduct assessments of their polling locations with the updated accessibility checklist before the 2014 gubernatorial election. Requiring county Boards of Elections conduct assessments with current standards at this time will ensure that polling places comply with ADA requirements. This then should require only a quick review in subsequent years. To establish compliant polling locations now will save Boards of Election time and resources in future years once they have established compliant polling locations. We also encourage your office, as you did in 2013, to continue training county boards of elections on the most recent standards.

The alarming extent of noncompliance that was revealed in Franklin County illustrates the need for these further evaluations. Ohioans in all counties of the state are entitled to fair, open, and accessible opportunities for political participation. Your office has taken many steps toward this goal, and we hope that you will do what is necessary to uphold voting access for all Ohioans.

Sincerely,



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CC: Brett Harbage, ADA Coordinator, Office of the Ohio Secretary of State