



OHIO VOTER RIGHTS COALITION

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Voting Advocates Urge Legislature Not to Shortchange Voters *Appropriate necessary funds to ensure a smooth election in 2016*

Today, voting advocates called on the Ohio General Assembly to provide voters and election officials with the tools necessary for a smooth 2016 election. “We need to prepare now to make sure Ohio is ready for the next presidential election,” said Carrie Davis, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio. “If the legislature does not fund essential aspects of election administration, we are setting ourselves up for problems next year.”

In all, advocates support three measures that would aid election officials in the administration of high-turnout elections, noting that upgrades would lead to a smoother election operation in 2016. Voting rights advocates support a budget amendment appropriating funding for the mailing of absentee ballot applications, electronic pollbooks for all county Boards of Elections, and online voter registration.

Voting advocates are pleased that Ohio Secretary of State Husted’s office has indicated he will be asking for an appropriation to continue sending absentee ballot applications to all registered voters. In the past, federal funds were used to cover such costs but those funds are no longer available. Voter advocates were deeply concerned that this request was not in the initial budget but are hopeful that the legislature will agree to the Secretary’s request.

“The absentee mailing is critical to smooth election administration, because voting patterns have changed,” said Ellis Jacobs with the Miami Valley Voter Protection Coalition. “Since 2006 when absentee voting was opened to all voters, upwards of one-third of Ohio voters choose to cast their ballot before Election Day. Voters are accustomed to receiving their absentee application in the mail, and there would likely be confusion, delays, and increased problems if the mailing is not funded.”

Last year, the legislature passed SB 205, a bill that prohibits local boards of elections or any government official other than the Secretary of State from sending absentee applications out to all voters. “No one else can pick up this responsibility,” said Cathy Johnston, advocacy director of the Coalition on Homelessness & Housing in Ohio. “SB 205 indicated that only the Secretary

may send the applications and that can happen only if the legislature appropriates funds. We worry if this doesn't happen, we will see long lines at the polls.”

Voter advocates also urge the legislature to make good on a second promise. Last year, the legislature passed SB 109 that created a process for certifying electronic pollbooks, but they stopped short of providing needed funds for purchasing them. “E-pollbooks have numerous benefits, including making it easier to maintain updated and accurate records of voters who cast early ballots, providing poll workers a complete database so they can look up all voters and addresses, and significant cost savings over printed lists,” said Peg Rosenfield, Election Specialist with the League. “We urge the legislature to provide the \$15 million necessary to purchase electronic pollbooks statewide, so that every county has uniform access to this equipment.”

“Online voter registration is a bi-partisan concept whose time has come,” said Catherine Turcer with Common Cause Ohio. “It’s more secure, convenient and accurate than traditional paper forms, and it will save taxpayer money. With measures pending in both the House and Senate, and with Secretary of State Husted a longtime supporter of the process, it’s no surprise online voter registration is getting a lot of attention these days.”

“Voter advocates, county election officials, and the Ohio Secretary of State agree that these three important measures will have a lasting positive impact on election administration in Ohio,” said Camille Wimbish, Election Administration Director for Ohio Voice, “and we urge the legislature to approve them now.”