

A 10-POINT PROPOSAL FOR ELECTION ADMINISTRATION REFORM

The League of Women Voters of Ohio

January 29, 2007

SUMMARY

In the wake of the 2004 presidential election, the League of Women Voters of Ohio board voted unanimously to advocate for reforming Ohio's system of election administration. The LWVO has two goals for election reform: First, to assure fair and honest elections; and second, to assure transparency in the election process so that voters, the media, candidates, and the general public have confidence that elections are fair and honest.

By the 2006 election, the following League-supported changes had been achieved:

- Voters could now vote absentee without giving a reason;
- Voters may vote a provisional ballot if something goes awry with their absentee ballot;
- The Secretary of State had hired staff to address concerns of voters with disabilities;
- High school seniors of 17 could now act as poll workers; and
- The five-minute time limit for voting has been unofficially relaxed.

But there is much more to be done. The following 10 recommendations are based on League history and experience, and are grounded in League positions and principles. The list is arranged in alphabetical order.

For further detail about each recommendation, [2007 10-POINT PROPOSAL FOR ELECTION ADMINISTRATION REFORM](#) or phone the LWVO office: 1-877-598-6446.

1. Absentee voting: *Ensure that all persons eligible to vote by absentee ballot can do so in a timely way.*

Overseas voters, those in hospitals, assisted-living facilities and nursing homes, and non-felons in jail must be informed that they are entitled to vote and must receive absentee ballots upon request in a timely way. The timing of absentee ballot application, delivery and return must allow overseas voters to have their votes counted with all others. Finally, the Ohio Revised Code should mandate a system for tracking and reporting how all absentee and provisional ballots are handled.

2. Accessibility: *Ensure that voting locations, equipment and instructions are fully accessible to all voters, including those with disabilities.*

Voters with disabilities must be afforded all the information, assistance and accommodation necessary to comply with state and federal law *and* to cast their vote with the same privacy as their non-disabled peers. Elements of access include parking, physical access to polling places, adapted voting equipment, seating, restrooms, signage, assistance as legally allowed, and adapted ballots.

3. County boards of elections: *Ensure increased support and assistance to the county boards of elections.*

The office of the Secretary of State must address its responsibility to provide ongoing training and technical assistance to the county boards of elections. This includes ensuring that at both the state and county levels: all Freedom of Information and Sunshine laws are observed; that voter registration databases are properly maintained; and that election equipment vendors act independently of political campaigns.

For their part, county boards of elections must ensure citizen participation in election oversight and appoint ombudsmen to investigate and address the public's problems and concerns. In addition, county boards of elections must provide adequate training and rapid, accurate assistance to their poll workers. They must provide an effective, transparent voting experience for all. And on election night, they must verify the accuracy of the ballot tally by publicly hand-counting randomly selected ballots cast.

4. Impartial election administration: *Create an impartial election administration system.*

The LWVO endorses a nonpartisan system of election administration independent of the office of the Secretary of State. An impartial and independent system would eliminate the possibility for partisan advantage – and the possibility of the appearance of partisan advantage – in running Ohio's elections.

5. Poll workers: *Improve poll workers' training and experience.*

In every precinct across the state of Ohio, poll workers must be actively recruited, thoroughly trained, fully supported for Election Day questions and problems that arise, and formally appreciated for their service. Poll workers should be tested on their knowledge of our increasingly complex voting system prior to Election Day and graded on their Election Day performance.

6. Provisional ballots and voter identification requirements: *Ensure that these two interrelated issues do not prevent eligible voters from having their ballots counted.*

The Ohio Revised Code must be amended to ensure that provisional ballots are available to all voters who may need them, and that there is uniform treatment of—and full accountability for—provisional ballots across the state. Provisional ballots are meant to provide a fail-safe way for every voter to cast a *counted* vote. Voters must be able to cast a provisional ballot in any precinct in their county. Furthermore, eligible voters should be able to register on Election Day and use a provisional ballot.

Current requirements for voter identification are complex and ambiguous. These must be clarified or eliminated.

7. Recounts and challenges: *Ensure that each recount is honest, accurate and accepted as so.*

The Ohio Revised Code must ensure that recount and challenge procedures are governed by a uniform set of rules and procedures. There must also be adequate security measures for materials and equipment; a minimum 3% random hand recount provision; and an immediate,

appropriate Ohio Supreme Court review of election challenges. Further, there must be clear procedures allowing witnesses to view documents and ballots during counts and recounts.

8. Voter education: *Ensure that voters are provided with the information they need.*

Registered voters should receive a full description of where and how to vote, including: a sample ballot, instructions for early/absentee/provisional voting; an introduction to their voting machinery; and where to find substantive information about candidates and issues. County boards of elections and the Secretary of State should have user-friendly websites offering basic election information. They should also prepare and distribute educational materials to special populations such as newly registered voters and students.

9. Voter registration: *Ensure timely and accurate voter databases at both the county and state levels.*

The requirements *and intent* of the national Voting Rights Act and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) should be enforced so that the registration process is fair, accessible and user-friendly.

10. Voting systems and security: *Ensure that each voting system provides an accurate, transparent and secure record of all ballots cast.*

Voting systems need to be fiscally feasible, secure, accurate, recountable, accessible, and have the public's trust. Ease of recounts and reliability is essential. At this time, the optical scan machines appear to be the most capable of meeting these goals and should be adopted statewide. Whichever type of voting system is in use, security measures are paramount in the development, testing, approval, implementation and oversight processes.