

May 24, 2023

Dear Secretary LaRose, President Huffman, Speaker Stephens, and Members of the General Assembly:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to request that you fully and immediately fund the Special Election that will take place in August 2023.

The Ohio Voter Rights Coalition was at the forefront of organizations calling on the Legislature not to allow an August Special Election. We are deeply dissatisfied with the decision of the General Assembly to go forward. Regardless, we are also concerned that this election is fair and accessible to all and that the outcome is one that represents the will of the **majority** of Ohio voters.

Boards of Elections are already under a great deal of pressure due to various factors, including but not limited to:

- An overhaul of how elections are conducted and how Ohioans cast their ballot after the passage of HB 458 in the 134th General Assembly;
- The misinformation/disinformation campaigns related to the 2020 presidential election that have cast unfounded damage to the reputation of Ohio's elections officials and the elections system at large; and
- The increasingly high turnover rates among elections officials and poll workers which has led to a loss of knowledge, skill, and experience in conducting Ohio elections with highest possible integrity and competence.

The addition of an August special election in an odd year without **fully funding** that election is an unreasonable expectation. Note that **elections are not a one day affair**. Boards of Elections prepare for an election long before Election Day, and the work of that election continues for up to a month after Election Day. What this means, essentially, is that Boards of Elections will actually be running two elections at once in August, closely followed by a 2024 Primary Election season that actually begins in December. On August 9 - just one day after the Special Election - Boards of Elections will have to start verifying thousands of petition signatures for the General Election, an arduous and time consuming process if done correctly. All of this represents just a small sample of the kind of work that is conducted by Boards of Elections, many with only 2 or 3 year round staff members.

The fact that statewide special elections were eliminated by the General Assembly just a few months ago will confuse Ohio voters as to whether or not there is indeed an election this August. Furthermore, the issue on which Ohioans have been asked to vote in this year's special election is a critical one. The magnitude of potential change to Ohio's democracy requires every possible effort on behalf of this state to notify Ohioans that there will be an election in August and facilitate that vote in the easiest way possible.

For all of these reasons, we ask the General Assembly for the following:

- Fully fund the administrative and staffing needs of all 88 County Boards of Elections now.
- Fully fund the cost of mailing every registered voter a vote-by-mail application (Form 11-A prescribed by the Ohio Secretary of State).
- Fully fund the cost of return postage for every absentee ballot returned by mail.
- Fully fund the cost of a statewide **nonpartisan** public information campaign notifying voters of an August 8 election.

We believe the above-mentioned measures are the minimum obligations that the General Assembly must meet to ensure a truly fair and democratic election on such a critical issue. It is worth noting that these are actionable items in line with comments made by the most vocal supporters of Senate Joint Resolution 2. In the final debate during the House Session on May 10 on Senate Joint Resolution 2, Representative Stewart mentioned that,

“SJR 2 will ask Ohioans, not us, whether Ohio’s constitution should require a 60 percent vote threshold to adopt amendments moving forward.”

We contend that in order for that to be true, a majority of registered Ohio voters must actually make their voices heard on this issue.

Additionally, Representative Bob Peterson said,

“This is a bonafide state issue we’re talking about that’s going to have a lot of attention paid to it and a lot of resources put into it.”

We agree that this is indeed a bonafide state issue and urge him and his colleagues to fund **nonpartisan** resources that will ensure a fair election and just outcome that will reflect the wishes of Ohio voters.

Representative Hoops mentioned during that session that,

“Voters will be able to get an absentee ballot mailed to their homes... Every voter can mail back their ballot in a postage paid envelope.”

We agree that if this were indeed the case, Ohioans could potentially decide this issue. But that would require further action by the Legislature to explicitly fund the mailing of vote-by-mail forms to every Ohio voter and postage paid for every returned ballot.

Direct democracy is a long standing, proud tradition of this great state. We agree with the legislature that it is indeed Ohioans who should decide this issue, and we ask every Ohio representative and senator to swiftly do their part to pass the above mentioned measures. Thank you for considering this important issue.

Respectfully,

Ohio Voter Rights Coalitions Steering Committee:

Jen Miller, League of Women Voters of Ohio

Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio

Collin Marozzi, ACLU of Ohio

Kayla Griffin, All Voting is Local Action