

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2020

The Honorable Frank LaRose
Secretary Of State
22 North Fourth Street, 16th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Secretary of State LaRose:

Every year millions of Ohioans line-up at their local boards of elections and polling sites to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to vote.¹ Everything must be done to ensure the health and safety of poll workers and those casting in-person votes. A coalition of 200 doctors, dozens of faith leaders, and leading voting rights advocates recently urged you to take specific steps to protect the health and safety of voters and poll workers in this upcoming election.² On behalf of Ohio voters and poll workers, we urge you to fully consider and implement their recommendations.

Ohioans who vote in-person this election should not have to make the impossible decision over whether to risk their health to exercise their fundamental right to vote. Ohio is no stranger to long lines at polling locations with vote wait times that are sometimes as long as 10 hours.^{3 4} While this is already a disruption to the voting process, we are concerned that the shortage of poll workers will further exacerbate this problem and increase the risk of further spread of the Coronavirus.^{5 6} With this in mind, we ask that you commit to ensuring that polls and in-person absentee voting sites have the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect poll workers and voters.

Ohio's polling locations should take every possible step to mitigate the risks to in-person voters and poll workers. We urge you to, at a minimum, immediately implement the following six recommendations from the letter referenced above:

1. All voters waiting inside or outside of the polling location must observe rules regarding 6-foot distancing.
2. Polling locations should be required to post signage encouraging those who have any of the underlying conditions (defined by the Ohio Department of Health) to ask for "special protection." That protection should include being offered voting outside as well as being given preference in voting order to reduce their indoor exposure time.

¹ <https://www.sos.state.oh.us/elections/election-results-and-data/>

² <https://www.commoncause.org/ohio/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/08/Final-LaRose-Health-Letter-2.pdf>

³ <https://www.vox.com/presidential-election/2016/11/6/13542680/there-are-4000-people-in-a-half-mile-voting-line-in-cincinnati-today-this-isn-t-okay>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/26/opinion/26tue4.html>

⁵ <https://www.wcpo.com/news/election-2020/shortage-of-poll-workers-could-cause-voting-delay-in-november>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html>

3. All poll workers and voters must wear face masks or face shields when inside polling locations. Additionally, disposable masks should be made available to all voters who do not bring their own to the polls. Voters who decline to wear a mask, or who cannot wear one for health reasons, or who request voting outside the polling location should be escorted to an out-door or separate, isolated area of the voting location, and be allowed to complete their voting process there. In this regard, Ohio's existing rules on assisting voting in cars for those with disabilities could be extended and streamlined to "drive through" arrangements.
4. Voters should be required to wash hands or use hand-sanitizer when entering and when leaving the polling location.
5. Plastic barriers must be erected at any poll worker station where more than 1-minute interactions between poll workers and voters are expected.
6. Indoor polling places must be well ventilated or well-filtered if supplied by recirculating air.

As Ohio's Secretary of State, it is your responsibility to ensure that all Ohioans have access to safe in-person voting options and that poll workers, the backbone of our democracy, are afforded every health and safety precaution in this upcoming election. You have an urgent obligation to communicate the steps you are proactively taking to instill confidence in the machinery of democracy. We urge you to implement these recommendations, and thank you for your prompt consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress



Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

CC: Lance Himes, Interim Ohio Department of Health Director