

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/ohio-voter-rights-coalition-condemns-controlling-board-vote-denying-prepaid-return>

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COLUMBUS Today, the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition issued the following statement in response to the Ohio Controlling Boards decision to deny prepaid return postage for absentee ballots. The Controlling Board voted along party lines (4-2) to keep Secretary of State Frank LaRose from purchasing first class stamps for all absentee ballot return envelopes.

For what feels like the umpteenth time this year, Ohio legislators failed to do whats best for voters. Todays decision to reject Secretary LaRoses proposal to cover the cost of prepaid return postage for absentee ballots will undoubtedly have negative consequences on the upcoming election. By refusing to allocate state funds to cover postage, the members of the Controlling Board are forcing voters who either need to or want to vote by mail to pay out of their own pocket to do so. This decision is doubly disappointing given that just five months ago the Ohio legislature voted unanimously to prepay postage for all voters for our primary election. Inconsistencies like these add unnecessary confusion to an election occurring during a global pandemic. With their vote today, the Ohio Controlling Board has implemented a modern-day poll tax on those voters who will be voting by mail this year.

Let us be clear, todays decision by the Controlling Board makes it harder to vote in Ohio and fails to take important lessons from our primary election five months ago. Administering an election in the midst of a pandemic requires innovative solutions, one of which is to remove the monetary burden of voting by mail. Others are to allow multiple secure drop boxes (which would also decrease the need for prepaid postage), counting ballots postmarked on Election Day, and allow multiple early voting locations - all of which have been categorically denied despite their broad bipartisan support from voters, election officials, and voting rights advocates across the state. Ohios leaders continue to neglect the needs of voters to have safe and accessible voting options this November.

Todays vote by the Controlling Board was an opportunity for legislators to do whats right and remove a barrier to the ballot box. Sadly, they chose to do nothing. Make no mistake, Ohio voters will be hurt most by this vote.

The Ohio Voter Rights Coalition urges Ohioans who plan to vote by mail to request their absentee ballots earlier, and, if convenient, return the completed ballot via their county secure drop-box if they are unable to afford postage.

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