

The regular monthly meeting of the Erie County Board of Elections was called to order by Chairman Thomas Ferrell on Friday, October 20th, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.

Roll Call:	(D) Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman	Present
	(D) MaryAnn Groot, Member	Present
	(R) Lisa M. Crescimano, Member	Present
	(R) Nancy C. McKeen, Member	Present

Guests in attendance: Jason Hinners from Erie County Prosecutor's Office, Rachel Ruffer from Ohio Secretary of State's Office, Amy Grubbe, and Debra Nickoloff

Mr. Ferrell welcomed Ms. Groot to the board. Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the minutes from the September 22nd meeting, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Alex Jones, Director, presented the October bills to the board. Most of them are related to the November election, so that money will be placed back in our accounts after November. The board members took a few moments to review the bills.

Mr. Ferrell asked how early voting turnout is. Mr. Jones stated it has been steady. We have averaged about 200 early voters per day. Over 1,300 people have voted early, in person. About 200 absentee ballots have been returned to us, and the applications for mail-in ballots keep coming.

Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the bills as presented, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

For the Director's Report, Mr. Jones welcomed Ms. Groot to the board and said the staff looked forward to working with her. He then stated we received a phone call from a voter yesterday concerned about an email from the superintendent of Vermilion Schools, who was using his district email to encourage staff members to vote. Adrienne James, Deputy Director, emailed Mr. Hinners about the matter.

Mr. Hinners stated he thinks it walks the line without going over. The email encourages people to vote not just for the levy issue, but for board members, without specifically stating who to vote for. Mr. Hinners said it all goes back to Section 9.03 of the Revised Code. You cannot use public funds to publish, distribute, or otherwise communicate information that supports or opposes the passage of a levy or bond issue. The State Auditor has compiled a Frequently Asked Questions document on this matter. You can put out factual information regarding a levy, such as what the money will be used for and how it will impact the budget. In the superintendent's email, it does not say to vote yes on the levy. If someone has an issue with the email, they can go the State Auditor's Office. It is not necessarily an issue the Board of Elections would weigh on. Mr. Hinners stated that in his opinion, there's not an issue with it.

Ms. Crescimano stated that the email never says to vote yes; it just says to go vote. Mr. Hinners stated the email also mentions when the election is, when early voting is, and when to register. It mentions board members, but it doesn't say which ones. He again iterated that he doesn't see an issue with it.

Mr. Jones then commented on an issue with absentee ballots that he emailed the board members about earlier this week. He stated that when we print ballots, they are printed in the application sequence. So, for example, if Lisa, Nancy, MaryAnn, and Tom submit applications to vote by mail in that order, that is the order the ballots will print. In the first round of absentee ballots that were mailed, one ballot was placed in front of two others. The example Mr. Jones gave was if Lisa received Nancy's ballot, Nancy received MaryAnn's ballot, and MaryAnn received Lisa's ballot. To Mr. Jones' knowledge, everything has now been corrected and everyone has received the correct ballot. He stated that our first round of absentee ballots was about 700, and we brought in part-time staff to stuff the envelopes. It was a good catch that someone made, and it's all taken care of, now.

Next, Mr. Jones commented on the upcoming holiday schedule. The county is observing Veterans' Day on November 10th. The state is requiring Boards of Elections to be open that day from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for the ballot cure period. In the past, the board has allowed staff to reallocate those holiday hours to a different day. After talking with staff, Mr. Jones would recommend the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. Ms. Crescimano motioned that the staff observes Veterans' Day on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Mr. Jones also stated that in the past, the board has allowed the office to close the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, with staff using their accrued time to take time off. The only thing to be aware of is that state petitions may come in that week, which Mr. Jones and Ms. James would come into the office to process. Ms. Crescimano motioned to have the staff take time between Christmas and New Year's and to close the office during that time. Ms. Groot seconded the motion. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Mr. Jones stated that Winter Conference is coming up and asked the board who they want to attend. He stated that last year, the clerks attended. Mr. Ferrell stated he has no objection to that and thinks it is beneficial. Ms. Groot asked when the conference is. Ms. Crescimano stated it would be January 10th, 11th, and 12th. Mr. Jones stated we would put together a plan and inform the board at the next meeting. He also asked Ms. Groot to stop by the office after the meeting to obtain the username and password for her Board of Elections email account.

Under new business was a name change request from a county commissioner candidate for the March 19th, 2024 Primary Election. Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the request from Patrick J. Shenigo to Patrick Shenigo, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Under "any other matters to come before the board," Ms. Crescimano stated she spoke with the other board members, and they would like to change the December meeting from December 21st at 9:00 a.m. to December 15th at 9:00 a.m. Ms. James stated she would update the calendar.

Ms. Groot stated she was at the post office last week and spoke to a gentleman there who identified himself as a signature judge at one of the precincts. Ms. Groot stated she did not identify herself. The gentleman stated that at the location he was working, they let a woman vote with an out-of-state license. Ms. Groot asked him if he recorded the incident. The signature judge stated he talked to the voting location manager, who just let the person vote. The signature judge also stated that at one election, a voter was showing people a political video in the voting area. Ms. Groot asked staff what they do in these circumstances.

Ms. James stated that we talk to the poll workers and let them know they can't do those things. We talk about it every election, but sometimes it doesn't stick. Ms. Groot asked if we continue to allow them to work. Mr. Ferrell stated they should not. Mr. Jones commented that for the May and August elections, we required people who hadn't been in training since the new law went into effect to come for in-person training. Ms. Groot asked if there was a training schedule since she would like to observe some classes. Ms. James stated we have a schedule of classes for VLMs, signature judges, ballot judges, and clerks.

Ms. Nickoloff stated she was an observer at a location where a voter came in with an expired out-of-state license, and the signature judge told them they could not vote. Ms. Nickoloff stated she knew the person was registered because she registered them. She told the VLM to call the Board of Elections, because the voter can bring ID in to the board. She stated we need to make the signature judges and VLMs aware of this. Ms. James stated that we cover that every election.

Mr. Jones stated that the poll workers are working once or twice a year, and there are many other things on their minds. One thing he has done with his VLM training is to compile as much information in as organized a manner as possible. For example, he has created a grid in his training packet that is basically an If, Then chart. So if someone comes in with an out-of-state license, then you do this, and this is who you call at the Board of Elections for more information. With 62 precincts and 35 polling locations, there is a lot that goes on, but we try to give the workers as many resources as we can.

Ms. Grubbe stated that the issues Ms. Groot relayed have been going on for awhile, and the signature judge has written about them. Ms. Grubbe stated it is important that when paperwork comes back that the board members take the time to read it. Sometimes you don't know what is happening in the field if you don't take the time to read the reports from the poll workers.

Ms. Grubbe then asked about the issue with the absentee ballots, and asked if this was in reference to a Kelleys Island ballot being sent to a voter in Perkins Township. Mr. Jones stated yes. Ms. Grubbe asked if there was a back-up. She stated in the past, there were two people checking and asked if that was still the case.

Mr. Jones replied that every application for an absentee ballot is checked and double-checked. The problem happened during the stuffing of envelopes. One ballot got shifted either two places back or two places forward, and it was a three-person loop. He stated we've mailed about 1,300 ballots, and we had one ballot out of order. It's unfortunate but not out of the realm of possibilities. Mr. Jones stated he was ready to call every single person we mailed a ballot to, but Ms. Ruffer calmed him down. It boiled down to human error.

Mr. Ferrell asked when training for VLMs is. Ms. James stated we have training next Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for all four positions. Mr. Ferrell asked Mr. Jones and Ms. James to speak with the VLM at the location where the issues were raised. Mr. Jones stated he would do that.

Ms. Crescimano motioned to adjourn, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. Board adjourned at 9:23 a.m.

Alexander W. Jones, Director

Attest:

Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman