

EFFECTS OF HB194 AND SB148 ON ABSENTEE VOTING. PART 1.

EXPECTED CROWDING OF IN-PERSON ABSENTEE VOTING IN 2012

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Summary: Between 25 and 35 days were available for in-person absentee voting in 2008, but two new Ohio bills would greatly reduce this time. If in-person absentee voting in 2012 is similar to that in 2008, the numbers of such voters per day and their waiting times would be 2.4 to 3 times greater if (per SB148) only 11.4 days were effectively available for in-person absentee voting and would be 4 to 6 times greater than in 2008 if (per HB194) only 6 days were effectively available. For instance, under HB194, Cuyahoga and Franklin counties would have to service some 9,000 voters per day when even half that number in 2008 produced 3 or more hours waiting. Contrary to expectation, both large and several smaller counties (e.g. Trumbull, Lucas, Lake, Richland) would be overcrowded, while other counties would not. **Therefore, a short absentee voting period with uniform hours for all counties would cause non-uniform crowding and most likely, a non-uniform loss of vote in different counties. Clearly, from the voter's point of view, one size does not fit all.**

Given the continued and increased popularity of in-person absentee voting in the 2010 election (compared to 2006), the most reasonable proposal for duration of in-person absentee voting is for 21 days, as proposed by the Ohio Association of Election Officials. Full flexibility should be given to counties to determine the extent to which they need to extend hours and days (including Sundays and the weekend before the election) in order to appropriately accommodate the expected number of in-person absentee voters based on the county's experience in 2008.

Summary of findings: HB194 and SB148 reduce the effective number of days for in-person absentee voting. What would be the anticipated effect in 2012 on numbers of voters per day to be processed by BOEs and on waiting times? In 2008, assuming the maximum voting period of 35 days, the average number of in-person absentee voters per day ranged from 27 to 1552 in a sample of 24 counties of different sizes. If counties were not open most weekends in 2008, then in the 25 possible days of in-person voting, voters per day in different counties ranged from 38 to 1120. In 2008, the longest waiting times for in-person absentee voters in 7 counties with the largest numbers of voters ranged from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour to 6 hours (median 2 hours). These 2008 numbers of voters per day and waiting times would be multiplied by 2.4 to 3 times if only 11.4 days were available (per HB148) for the same number of in-person absentee voting, and would be 4-6 times greater than in 2008 if only the 6 days permitted by HB194 were available for voting. For instance, under HB194, the two largest counties would have to handle 9000 rather than about 1500 voters per day, and waiting times would easily exceed 6 or more hours (most likely, discouraging many potential voters from staying). Smaller counties that had large numbers of in-person absentee voters in 2008 would also have overwhelming numbers of voters and long waiting times with the shorter period for in-person absentee voting prescribed by HB194 and SB148. On the other hand, counties with relatively few in-person absentee voters would probably not need much more than regular office hours to accommodate these voters.

Is it reasonable to anticipate similar numbers of in-person absentee voters in 2012 as there were in 2008? Several factors work in different directions. Those who experienced long lines in 2008 may be discouraged from trying to vote in-person absentee in 2012, and the Presidential race could be less hotly contested in 2012. On the other hand, voters sometimes say they are uncomfortable trusting their absentee ballots to the mails, and would prefer in-person absentee voting. Finally, the data (Table 1) show that in-person absentee balloting increased on average nearly three-fold across most counties in the state, between the comparable elections of 2006 and 2010. This positive experience for voters in 2010 could encourage even more voters to vote in-person absentee in 2012.

Given all these contrary factors and the danger of under-estimating in-person absentee voting in 2012, the most prudent assumption would be that in-person absentee voting in 2012 will be similar to that in 2008, and should be planned for accordingly.

Data: Most data were obtained from the Ohio Sec. of State website. Data on in-person absentee voting and waiting times in 2008 were not available on that website and were obtained by telephone queries of Boards of Election by staff of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio and by myself. The sampled counties represented 44% of the total state vote in 2008, and were those that had undergone consolidation between 2008 and 2010 of between 1% and 42% of precincts. The author is responsible for data analysis and conclusions.

Findings:

- 1. Popularity of in-person absentee voting.** In the 24 counties sampled, in-person absentee voting expressed as the percent of all votes (election day and absentee) cast per county, increased from 2.3% to 6.7% from the 2006 to the 2010 election (Table 1).
- 2. Projected increase in daily numbers of in-person absentee voters under restricted days and hours.** As per Table 2, restrictions of days and hours in SB148 would increase daily number of voters 2.4 to 3 times, while restrictions of HB194 would increase this number 4-6-fold. Several medium-sized counties will also experience serious overcrowding. In the 7 counties that had the largest number of in-person absentee voters (amongst the counties queried), the median waiting time in 2008 was 2 hours (range 0.75 to 6 hours). With a 3- or 6-fold increase in numbers of voters per day, waiting times could go up proportionately, but more likely, many voters, seeing the immensely long lines, would give up trying to vote.

3. **Table 1. Increase in pre-election day in-person voting, 2006 compared to 2010 General Election.** In the sampled counties, both large and small, in-person absentee voting increased almost 3-fold between 2006 and 2010. The differences in popularity of in-person absentee voting between counties (between 2 and 13% of the total vote), indicates that different daily hours and days may be chosen by different counties to accommodate a larger expected number of in-person voters in 2012.

County	2006 General Election			2010 General Election		
	Total votes cast	# of in-person absentee votes	in-person votes as % total votes	Total votes cast	# of in-person absentee votes	in-person votes as % total votes
ASHLAND	19,366	496	2.6%	17,713	1,251	7%
BROWN	14,565	499	3.4%	13,683	695	5%
COLUMBIANA	37,874	527	1.4%	34,211	1,006	3%
CRAWFORD	17,339	501	2.9%	14,325	1,096	8%
COSHOCTON	13,865	900	6.5%	12,488	1,616	13%
CUYAHOGA	469,930	2261	0.5%	432,051	7577	2%
DEFIANCE	13,745	1,721	12.5%	13,176	882	7%
FAIRFIELD	55,657	784	1.4%	51,100	2,470	5%
FRANKLIN	385,863	5,324	1.4%	388,698	7,760	2%
HARDIN	10,005	226	2.3%	9,177	795	9%
HIGHLAND	15,064	419	2.8%	12,465	859	7%
HOCKING	10,083	314	3.1%	9,190	725	8%
JACKSON	14,732	282	1.9%	10,330	461	4%
LAKE	91,348	1,031	1.1%	80,811	1,778	2%
LUCAS	221,980	1286	0.6%	147,029	6324	4%
MONTGOMERY	219,153	1,500	0.7%	188,491	6,072	3%
PAULDING	7,881	324	4.1%	7,048	495	7%
PUTNAM	19,169	316	1.6%	13,706	819	6%
RICHLAND	47,132	1,623	3.4%	41,980	3,819	9%
SANDUSKY	29,458	661	2.2%	20,282	1,261	6%
TRUMBULL	83,096	2,706	3.3%	74,386	5,581	8%
UNION	17,379	166	1.0%	17,912	1,844	10%
WARREN	70,660	1,414	2.0%	81,631	3,721	5%
WILLIAMS	13,492	424	3.1%	12,520	635	5%

Table 2. Effect of restricted days for in-person voting on expected numbers of such voters per day in 2012: Columns 2-6 are based on historical data. Columns 7 and 8 are projections based on smaller numbers of days permitted for in-person absentee voting, and assuming similar numbers of voters to that in 2008. Note that numbers in column 7 (under SB148) are over 3 times that in column 5 (2008 if county had 35 days absentee voting, as in Cuyahoga County) and 2.4 times column 6 (if 25 days). Under HB194 (column 8), the daily numbers are 6 times greater than column 5 and 4x column 6. Note (columns 7 and 8) that several medium-sized counties will also be greatly affected by large numbers of voters.

1. County	2. in-person absentee votes as % total vote	3. longest waits (hours) for in-person absentee voters in 2008	4. # of in-person absentee votes	5. 2008, average # in-person absentee voters per day over 35 days	6. 2008, average # in-person absentee voters per day over 25 days	7. expected average # in-person absentee voters per day (10.4 days, SB148)	8. expected average # in-person absentee voters per day (6 days, HB194)
JACKSON	6%		933	27	38	90	156
PAULDING	10%		1,014	29	41	98	169
UNION	4%		1,016	29	41	98	169
COSHOCTON	6%		1,086	31	43	104	181
HOCKING	10%		1,259	36	50	121	210
PUTNAM	7%		1,346	38	53	129	224
WILLIAMS	7%		1,386	40	56	133	231
HARDIN	11%		1,438	41	57	138	240
BROWN	7%		1,532	44	62	147	255
CRAWFORD	9%		1,849	53	74	178	308
COLUMBIANA	4%		1,897	54	76	182	316
ASHLAND	9%		2,373	68	95	228	396
SANDUSKY	8%		2,631	75	105	253	439
HIGHLAND	15%		2,994	86	120	288	499
FAIRFIELD	6%		4,246	121	169	408	708
DEFIANCE	25%		4,712	135	189	453	785
WARREN	8%		8,446	241	337	812	1408
RICHLAND	16%	1 to 1.5	10,009	286	400	962	1668
LAKE	8%	2	10,194	291	407	980	1699
TRUMBULL	10%	0.75	11,061	316	442	1064	1844
LUCAS	11%	3	24,557	702	983	2361	4093
MONTGOMERY	10%	1	28,000	800	1120	2692	4667
FRANKLIN	9%	6	53,447	1527	2138	5139	8908
CUYAHOGA	8%	3 to 4	54,325	1552	NA	5224	9054