

## EFFECTS OF HB194 AND SB148 ON ABSENTEE VOTING. PART 2.

### VARIATION BETWEEN OHIO COUNTIES IN USAGE OF AND NEED FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS, AND ITS EFFECTS ON CROWDING OF POLLING PLACES ON ELECTION DAY

#### (AND COMBINED CONCLUSIONS OF PART 1 AND PART 2)

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#### **Background:**

In crafting current legislation (HB194, SB 148), there might be more appreciation of the variation between the 88 counties in usage of absentee ballots, and its significance for reducing polling place crowding on election day. For instance, a review of 88-county election data shows that many small as well as large counties in effect depend on absentee voting to reduce voters per precinct on election day to a manageable number. County BOEs are in the best position and should be given the flexibility to weigh greater costs (poll workers, materials, machines, voter discontent) of dealing with potentially higher turnout at polling places against costs of promoting absentee voting to relieve pressure on election day voting. **Uniform prohibition of promoting absentee ballot usage, e.g. by prohibiting sending all voters unsolicited applications (per both bills), would have non-uniform effects, probably causing crowding at the polls in the most negatively affected counties.**

**Data:** Most data were obtained from the Ohio Sec. of State website. Data on in-person absentee voting in 2006 and 2008 were not available on the Secretary's website and were obtained by telephone queries of Boards of Election by staff of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio. However, the author is responsible for data analysis and conclusions.

**Analysis:** Results from the 13 "largest counties", defined as those with over 100,000 actual voters in 2008 and over 80,000 in 2010, are presented in bold italics in order to easily compare their results relative to all other counties. Also, note that the data average the results for all precincts in each county, so that the numbers for precincts could range widely on either side of the average. For instance, in Cuyahoga County in 2010, the average number of ballots cast on election day was 212, but there were several precincts in which over 350 ballots were cast. This spread could be very important in planning for election day 2012. For instance, counties which had relatively high average numbers of voters per precinct on election day 2010 almost surely will have precincts with much larger numbers, which could present problems in 2012.

#### **Summary of Findings:**

1. Table 1. Ohio's 88 counties showed wide variation in the number of in-person voters per precinct on election day November 2010 (ranging from 135 to 484). Counties towards the high end (mostly not the largest counties) may need to take action to prevent overcrowding in 2012 given expected higher turnout in Presidential elections. Of the 20 counties with the largest number of voters per precinct in 2010, 17 were not among the largest counties. In other words, concerns about potential crowding on election day in 2012 are shared by counties of all sizes. Counties with an average number of 350 election day voters per precinct in 2010 are likely to encounter several precincts with over 600 election day voters in 2012, especially if absentee voting is not actively marketed.
2. Table 2. Across the 88 counties, the percent of absentee voting ranged from 14% to 48% of total vote in 2010, with large counties generally falling within the same range as most other counties.

3. Figure 1. In 2006, as absentee voting increased, the numbers of votes cast per precinct on election day decreased (as expected). In most counties with 25% or more votes cast as absentee, there were about 300 or fewer voters per precinct. However, certain large and small/medium-sized counties which experienced relatively large average numbers of voters per precinct on election day in 2010 are likely to encounter overcrowding in 2012 if turnout is similar to that of 2008, and unless they are free to take preventive measures to increase in-person and/or mail-in absentee voting. Table 3 demonstrates this for the 5 largest counties.

### **Conclusion of Parts I and 2 and Recommendations:**

Imposing uniform restrictions on mailing unsolicited absentee ballots or setting a fixed number of daily BOE hours or days allowed during the statewide total pre-election absentee voting period takes away the flexibility counties need because of their very diverse circumstances. It is this flexibility that allows each BOE to achieve, in its own way, a manageable number of expected voters per day during the pre-election period and a manageable number of voters per precinct on election day, which is the important end-result that equalizes opportunities to vote across the state's 88 counties.

Recommendations for legislation:

1. Adopt the Ohio Association of Election Officials' recommendation of absentee voting 21 days prior to the election, to allow for wide variation in numbers and percent of in-person and mail-in absentee voters in different counties, and to have a consistent duration of both in-person and mail-in absentee voting;
2. Allow counties to increase days or hours within the 21-day period for in-person absentee voting if they have reason to expect heavy traffic in 2012;
3. Allow flexibility in how counties "market" absentee ballot applications (i.e., do not prohibit counties choosing to send out unsolicited absentee applications, or using other means, e.g. TV ads, tabling at county fairs, etc.), in order to enable counties, e.g. those with precinct consolidations, to avoid unduly high numbers of election day voters per precinct. Many precinct consolidations have been carried out in order to reduce costs, but these have been possible only because of greater use or anticipated use of absentee voting. Limiting counties' ability to encourage absentee voting will result in overcrowded precincts or force them to consider reversing precinct consolidations or to pay for additional machines and poll workers. Even these measures may not be possible, as counties face difficulties procuring any extra funding.

**Table 1. 2010 General Election, Counties ordered from smallest to greatest in the number of votes cast on election day per precinct.** The average number of election day voters per precinct varied enormously in 2010, from 135 to 484. Montgomery and many smaller counties which have the highest voters per precinct may have the most concerns about overcrowding in 2012. Note that results from the largest counties are dispersed widely in this table. Also note that of the 20 counties with the largest number of voters per precinct, 17 are not the largest counties. In other words, concerns about potential crowding on election day in 2012 are shared by counties of all sizes

County	2010 actual votes per precinct on election day	County	2010 actual votes per precinct on election day	County	2010 actual votes per precinct on election day
NOBLE	135	MORGAN	273	FAIRFIELD	354
MONROE	141	CRAWFORD	275	AUGLAIZE	359
VINTON	162	GUERNSEY	277	ERIE	362
LAWRENCE	168	TUSCARAWAS	281	LICKING	367
PERRY	173	DEFIANCE	282	RICHLAND	370
VAN WERT	188	HARRISON	286	CLARK	370
ADAMS	189	PREBLE	287	WOOD	377
ATHENS	199	PICKAWAY	290	DARKE	378
BELMONT	202	<b>STARK</b>	292	<b>WARREN</b>	<b>379</b>
MARION	203	SANDUSKY	296	MIAMI	386
ASHTABULA	204	<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>LAKE</b>	391
MADISON	211	MORROW	296	HOLMES	392
<b>CUYAHOGA</b>	<b>212</b>	OTTAWA	298	DELAWARE	393
MEIGS	217	WASHINGTON	300	CHAMPAIGN	397
ROSS	219	SENECA	303	WILLIAMS	406
HARDIN	221	COLUMBIANA	308	<b>MONTGOMERY</b>	<b>409</b>
GALLIA	223	<b>LUCAS</b>	308	SHELBY	437
MUSKINGUM	228	HANCOCK	311	PUTNAM	484
ALLEN	231	UNION	317		
SCIOTO	237	CARROLL	318		
<b>MAHONING</b>	241	GREENE	320		
JEFFERSON	241	PORTAGE	321		
FAYETTE	244	GEAUGA	321		
HENRY	250	HIGHLAND	324		
<b>TRUMBULL</b>	252	<b>HAMILTON</b>	<b>324</b>		
CLINTON	257	MEDINA	330		
WYANDOT	260	<b>BUTLER</b>	333		
HURON	261	<b>SUMMIT</b>	<b>334</b>		
KNOX	263	PAULDING	336		
CLERMONT	263	COSHOCTON	341		
JACKSON	263	<b>LORAIN</b>	343		
HOCKING	266	WAYNE	351		
LOGAN	270	MERCER	351		
ASHLAND	271	FULTON	352		
PIKE	272	BROWN	354		

**Table 2. 2010 General Election. Variation in usage of absentee votes (mail-in and in-person absentee).** Note huge variation from 14% to 48%. Although Franklin and Cuyahoga are among the highest users of absentee voting, many smaller counties also have benefited from absentee voting to reduce overcrowding (see also Fig. 1). Other smaller counties such as Putnam and Williams, with a high ratio of voters per polling place (Table 1) and low absentee usage,

might choose to market greater absentee voting (in-person and mail-in) to relieve pressure on the polls on election day 2012.

County	Absentee votes as % total cast	County	Absentee votes as % total cast	County	Absentee votes as % total cast
AUGLAIZE	14%	HOLMES	20%	<b>MAHONING</b>	<b>25%</b>
COLUMBIANA	15%	OTTAWA	20%	ROSS	26%
FULTON	15%	CHAMPAIGN	20%	<b>LUCAS</b>	<b>26%</b>
PUTNAM	15%	GALLIA	20%	KNOX	26%
SANDUSKY	15%	ATHENS	20%	PIKE	27%
PREBLE	16%	ASHLAND	20%	MUSKINGUM	27%
WILLIAMS	16%	HARRISON	20%	VINTON	27%
SENECA	16%	GREENE	21%	MORGAN	28%
DARKE	16%	LOGAN	21%	VAN WERT	29%
WYANDOT	16%	<b>WARREN</b>	<b>21%</b>	MONROE	29%
ASHTABULA	16%	CRAWFORD	21%	MADISON	31%
SHELBY	17%	HANCOCK	21%	COSHOCTON	32%
PORTAGE	17%	CLARK	21%	NOBLE	36%
BROWN	17%	CLINTON	21%	<b>FRANKLIN</b>	<b>39%</b>
ALLEN	17%	RICHLAND	22%	BELMONT	41%
MERCER*	18%	JEFFERSON	22%	<b>CUYAHOGA</b>	<b>48%</b>
MARION	18%	GUERNSEY	22%		
MORROW	18%	<b>MONTGOMERY</b>	<b>22%</b>		
WOOD	18%	UNION	22%		
WAYNE	18%	MEDINA	22%		
<b>STARK</b>	<b>18%</b>	DELAWARE	23%		
<b>BUTLER</b>	<b>18%</b>	PERRY	23%		
HENRY	18%	LAWRENCE	23%		
DEFIANCE	19%	ADAMS	23%		
MEIGS	19%	<b>LORAIN</b>	<b>23%</b>		
PAULDING	19%	HARDIN	23%		
CARROLL	19%	WASHINGTON	23%		
GEAUGA	19%	JACKSON	24%		
HIGHLAND	19%	TUSCARAWAS	24%		
<b>SUMMIT</b>	<b>19%</b>	FAIRFIELD	24%		
<b>TRUMBULL</b>	<b>19%</b>	ERIE	24%		
CLERMONT	20%	<b>HAMILTON</b>	<b>24%</b>		
HURON	20%	<b>LAKE</b>	<b>24%</b>		
PICKAWAY	20%	LICKING	24%		
MIAMI	20%	SCIOTO	24%		
FAYETTE	20%	HOCKING	25%		

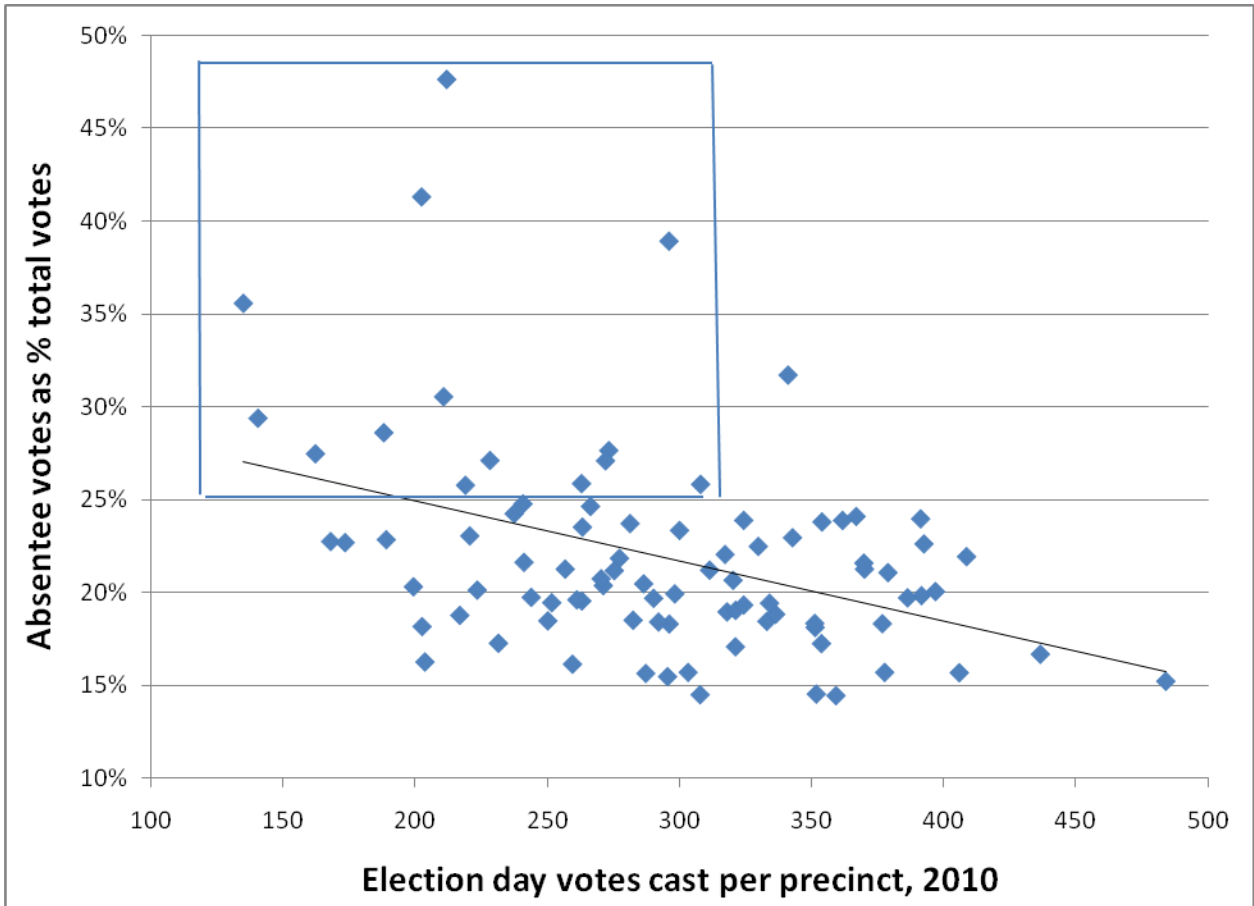
Figure 1. Relation between percent absentee voting in 2010 and the number of votes cast at the polls.

Each data point represents one county, and all 88 counties are included.

Note the trend: the higher the percent of absentee voting, the smaller the number of voters per precinct.

Also note that with only one exception, all counties with 25% or more of the votes cast as absentee

(inset box) had about 300 or fewer votes cast per precinct.



**Table 3. The 5 largest counties: different situations with respect to potential overcrowding and use of absentee voting by voters in the 5 largest counties, with projection of precinct usage by voters in 2012.** Notice that Cuyahoga and Franklin, that ranked low in respect to voters per precinct on election day in 2010 (column 5), are also among the highest counties in % absentee votes (Table 2). Hamilton, Summit and Montgomery counties, that rank in the top third of counties with the highest election day votes per precinct, have lower % absentee voting. If absentee voting were reduced further in 2012 because mailing of unsolicited absentee ballots was prohibited, even greater numbers of voters per precinct would be predicted than shown in column 7, i.e. overcrowding might result, especially in Hamilton, Summit and Montgomery counties.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Total votes 2008 (all absentee + all election day votes)	Total votes 2010	votes cast in-person on election day per precinct in 2010	Rank from small to large, in 2010 election day votes per precinct, amongst the 88 counties (Table 1)	% of all votes that were absentee in 2010	*projected number of votes cast on election day per precinct in 2012 if % absentee voting in 2012 is the same as in 2010
CUYAHOGA	672,750	432,051	212	13	48%	330
FRANKLIN	564,971	388,698	296	46	39%	454
HAMILTON	429,267	289,791	324	60	24%	480
SUMMIT	280,841	197,000	334	63	19%	487
MONTGOMERY	280,746	188,491	409	86	22%	609

\*In order to project how many votes per precinct would be expected in 2012 if the per-cent of absentee voting did not change from 2010, and also if total votes in 2012 were the same as in 2008, the number of in-person election votes per precinct in 2010 (column 4) was multiplied by the ratio of total votes in 2008 (column 2) divided by the total votes in 2010 (column 3).