

August 15, 2019

Secretary of State Frank LaRose
180 E. Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Ohio's scheduled September 6, 2019 voter purge

Dear Secretary LaRose,

We write to express significant concerns about Ohio's planned voter removal of approximately 235,000 voters from the registration lists.

While we appreciate your effort to centralize the voter purge lists and engage community groups in contacting voters, information your office recently made public calls into question the accuracy and fairness of Ohio's list maintenance practices.

1. Errors in four counties, with significant questions about whether other counties have made errors.

As has already been documented by your office, four counties had errors in the voter purge list that led the nearly 1,300 voters wrongly added. These errors were found through a financial audit for reimbursement of local board of elections, but we remain concerned that the lists of voters to be purged have not been thoroughly audited to ensure other voters were not wrongly included.

We have recently analyzed the voter purge list and found more than 4,000 voters who are listed as active voters on the Secretary of State's own registration database. We are extremely concerned that these voters may be on the list in error, especially given that other errors have already been identified.

2. Short timeframe and capacity of voting rights groups.

We appreciate your office's willingness to partner with community groups to reach voters at risk of being purged, but doing so just over one month before the planned purge does not provide a serious, meaningful opportunity for our groups to make contact with 235,000 voters across the state of Ohio.

3. Incomplete information in the voter purge list.

The list provided by your office does not indicate how a voter arrived on the purge list—whether that be because they are deceased, filed a request with the National Change of Address system, registered to vote in another state, or due to inactivity. This information is critical in assisting voting rights groups in prioritizing their contacts to voters.

In addition, this information is important in determining any possible discrepancies in the list. For instance, in our initial analysis of the purge list provided by your office, by comparing it to voter information databases, we found as many as 17,500 people on the list who cast a ballot in the 2018 general election. What is still unclear is whether these individuals may have filed a NCOA request, or were added to the purge list for some other reason. Fewer than one percent of the voters on the purge list came up as deceased or with an address outside of Ohio when run through voter information databases. Given the inaccuracies already found, these initial findings raise significant concerns that need to be fully investigated.

4. Confusing materials for voters who are at risk of being purged.

Because the postcard notices sent to voters are confusing and may be disregarded by voters, they remain a source of continuous concern for us. The website created for the Registration Reset program is incredibly

difficult for voters to maneuver, and does not include clear next steps for what voters should do if they find their name on the list. Despite previously raising these concerns with your staff, they have not been adequately addressed.

5. Voters from historically marginalized groups most at risk of purge.

Previous research by reporters at Thomson Reuters found that voters of color are more likely to be purged than white voters in Ohio.¹ We continue to be concerned that voters in historically disenfranchised communities are most at risk of being purged from the rolls. This is complicated by the fact that election officials communicate with these voters largely by mail, which can be ineffective in reaching communities of color. Other types of outreach should be explored by the Secretary of State's office, and should not be the sole responsibility of voting rights groups.

This marks the first time that Ohio's voter purge process has been centralized and the first time that voting rights groups have been given the opportunity to contact voters prior to a scheduled purge. However, the errors already discovered, the lack of consistency between different county boards of elections, the incomplete information given to voting rights groups, and the confusing and outdated modes of communicating with voters all point to the need to pause the state's voter purge process and not move forward on September 6.

We must not rush forward with Ohio's deeply flawed purge system while these issues remain unresolved. We strongly agree with your call for the Ohio legislature to move swiftly to modernize our antiquated voter registration system, but we must not move forward with more inaccurate and flawed voter purges while we wait for them to act. The right to vote is the most precious right granted to citizens—we urge you to protect the rights of Ohio voters and delay the September 6, 2019 voter purge.

Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions or need more information.

Sincerely,

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¹ Available at:
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-votingrights-ohio-insight/use-it-or-lose-it-occasional-ohio-voters-may-be-shut-out-in-november-idUSKCN0YO19D>.