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SECRETARY OF STATE'S DIRECTIVE WILL INCREASE NUMBER OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS ACCEPTED FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS

Today, Secretary of State Jon Husted [released a directive](#) that both clarifies and improves the way election administrators in Ohio will conduct absentee voting for future elections. The directive included eight instructions meant to address the unusually high quantity of late absentee ballots that were received by boards of elections across Ohio after the November 3, 2015 General Election.

According to Pat McDonald, the Director of the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, the primary cause of the problem was the lack of a postmark on ballots received after Election Day.

“Ohio law allows us to count absentee ballots received up to 10 days after Election Day as long as they are postmarked by the U.S. Postal Service prior to Election Day. However, we had to reject over 900 ballots we received after Election Day because they did not have a postmark,” said McDonald.

The same issue was experienced in many other counties in Ohio, including in Summit County where over 800 late-arriving ballots were rejected because no postmark had been applied.

However, after thorough discussions between his staff and the U.S. Postal Service, Secretary Husted has identified several common-sense solutions that will help reduce the number of rejected ballots for future elections. The solutions include using a smaller “letter-sized” envelope that is more likely to be postmarked than larger envelopes and the expansion and clarification of what election officials can consider a “postmark”.

“In addition to the ‘traditional’ postmark, we will now be able to use the date printed on postage labels obtained from a U.S. Postal Service customer service window or self-service kiosk”, said McDonald. “This provision alone would have allowed us to count over 330 additional ballots from last year’s General Election,” he said.

Additionally, the directive requires boards of elections to obtain an inexpensive scanner that has the ability to scan a fluorescent barcode applied by the U.S. Postal Service to most envelopes

processed by its equipment. The bar code includes a date- and time-stamp that, when transcoded by the scanner, can be used as a postmark date to determine whether the ballot can be counted.

“In a post-election test with this scanner, we found that 250 ballots were actually processed by the U.S. Postal Service prior to Election Day,” said McDonald.

While some of the requirements included in the directive need to be implemented prior to the March 15, 2016 Primary Election, boards of elections will need to meet all requirements prior to the November 8, 2016 General Election.

“It’s important to have this problem addressed prior to the Presidential Election because all voters in Ohio will receive an absentee ballot application, and we expect up to 1.9 million voters statewide to vote absentee,” said McDonald.

McDonald believes Secretary Husted’s directive will result in a significant decrease in the number of absentee ballots his office will have to reject in future elections. “Secretary Husted recently released a [report](#) showing how boards of elections in Ohio have decreased the number of rejected provisional ballots since he took office in 2011. I believe this directive will have the same effect on rejected absentee ballots,” he said.

“It represents a major win not only for voters in Cuyahoga County, where absentee voting is very popular each election, but for all Ohio voters. It’s going to ensure that ballots that should count, will count,” said McDonald.

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