



January 7, 2019

Athens County Commissioners
15 S. Court Street, Second Floor
Athens, OH 45701

Re: Athens County Board of Elections Relocation

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Mike Brickner and I am the Ohio State Director for All Voting is Local. I write to you regarding the potential move of the Athens County Board of Elections.

All Voting is Local launched in 2018 as a collaborative effort housed at The Leadership Conference Education Fund, within its project, Access Democracy, in conjunction with the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation; the American Constitution Society; the Campaign Legal Center; and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. In Ohio, our campaign has worked on several key initiatives, including coordinating nonpartisan Election Protection for voters; providing public education to voters with disabilities on their rights; and recruiting poll workers to ensure elections run smoothly.

We have followed the news coverage of the proposed relocation of the Athens County Board of Elections. As the Board of Elections seeks to move its offices, Commissioners must ensure the relocation does not unintentionally create new problems for the voters of Athens County.

Given the needs of the Athens County Board of Elections, and the shared desire of all stakeholders to make early in-person voting convenient for all county voters, we recommend the following:

- **Allow the Board of Elections to move its offices with the condition that early in-person voting site remain in the Athens city center.**

Ohio law requires that each county have only one early in-person voting site.¹ For most counties, Boards of Election have opted to designate their offices as that site. We have reviewed the 2018 and 2016 early in-person voting figures for Athens County, and believe that they may provide some guidance to county officials in selecting a site that will be most beneficial to voters.

In both 2016 and 2018 general elections, over 14 percent of all ballots cast in Athens County were early in-person. Two-thirds of all early in-person ballots cast in these elections came from voters in

¹ § O.R.C. 3501.10(C)

the city of Athens, versus the rest of the county. Fifteen of the 20 top precincts with the highest early in-person vote totals in the 2018 general election and 19 of the top 20 precincts in the 2016 general election were in the city of Athens. While voters in outlying townships and villages avail themselves of early in-person voting, it is fair to say that far more voters in the city utilize it.

The vast majority of early in-person ballots cast come from city residents, and the site must continue to be centralized for voters to access it. State law would allow the Board of Elections to move its offices to address ADA and storage concerns while still designating a more centralized site to serve early in-person voting.

- **Engage with Ohio University officials to identify an ADA-accessible location on campus for early in-person voting.**

The data show that there is likely to be a large increase in 2020 of Ohio University students who wish to cast a ballot early in-person, so ensuring that the early voting site is located in a centralized, convenient and accessible space is crucial.

According to the Athens County Board of Elections website, there are eight precincts in the city that include an Ohio University dormitory. While they are not the highest early in-person turnout precincts in Athens County, half of them in 2018 and all eight of them in 2016 had a higher percentage of early in-person voter turnout than the county average.

Most striking about the data for the eight precincts that include Ohio University dormitories is the dramatic change in early in-person turnout between the 2016 and 2018 elections. Four out of five of the top precincts with the greatest percent change between those elections were precincts with Ohio University dormitories.

Ohio University's various newly-constructed and likely ADA-compliant buildings are an important resource for the Board of Elections. Other jurisdictions have successfully made university buildings early in-person voting sites. In 2018, Florida created early in-person voting centers on at least nine university campuses.² Additionally, the Franklin County Board of Elections utilized the Ohio Student Union as a voting site for the August 2018 OH-12 Special Election, and Ohio State University officials offered free parking in its garage for voters. Such an arrangement would be convenient for students, accessible for voters with disabilities, and offer adequate parking for voters traveling from outlying parts of the county.

- **Address the ADA issues at the current county offices regardless of whether the Board of Elections relocates.**

As the Commission already noted in its discussion of accessibility with Brett Harbridge of the Secretary of State's Office, the building where the Board of Elections is located is largely inaccessible

² "UCF students grateful to have early voting location on campus," WKMG; <https://www.clickorlando.com/news/early-voting-underway-in-florida>.

to people with disabilities.³ Even if the Board moves its offices, there are other county officials who conduct business in that building, and accessibility concerns must be addressed regardless of the Board's location.

I have enclosed the data sets we compiled using the Athens County Board of Elections' publicly available information. Please feel free to contact me at (216)702-3034 or mike@allvotingislocal.org should you have any questions or need more information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike B." followed by a horizontal line.

Mike Brickner
Ohio State Director
All Voting is Local

cc: Debra Lee Quivey, director, Athens County Board of Elections
Penny L. Brooks, deputy director, Athens County Board of Elections
Dr. M. Duane Nellis, president, Ohio University
Jenny Hall-Jones, senior vice president and dean of students, Ohio University

³ "Uptown election office receives poor marks for ADA compliance," *Athens NEWS*;
https://www.athensnews.com/news/local/uptown-election-office-gets-poor-marks-for-ada-compliance/article_05a6f328-0926-11e9-b528-1fe630c79d20.html.