

Homeless Voting in Cleveland Ohio Presidential Election 2012

Final Report with Recommendations



Voters stood in line for over an hour to vote on the Saturday before the 2012 Presidential election in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

Prepared by the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless
With support from the Gund Foundation, State Voices and
Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio

www.neoch.org



Thank You for Your Support

The foundation of our democracy is the right to vote and participate in the process of electing those who represent us. It is critical for every citizen to have access to the ballot box and select those who pass laws, execute regulations, and protect life, liberty, and ability to pursue a stable existence. Even those living in shelters, on the streets, or doubled up in housing all have a right to vote, and have a greater incentive to select officials sensitive to housing and human service issues when voting. For a population that moves frequently and has a hard time remaining in contact with the rest of society, voting may be one of the last thoughts for a family struggling with where to find shelter, food and income. Because of their housing status, they are often hard to reach and may have a hard time maintaining contact with the community while they attempt to find stability.

Since the organization was founded in 1987, the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless has been engaged in voter registration and mobilization activities. At that time, the State required each person registering voters to be sworn in as Deputy Registers, and one of the earliest photos in the *Plain Dealer* about NEOCH featured about 30 volunteers and advocates being sworn in to register homeless people. We have put a large amount of staff and volunteer time into registering homeless people especially in the 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 Presidential elections, when there is a great deal of interest in voting. It is difficult to see a return on investment during off year elections, and difficult to show the importance of voting in non-Presidential elections especially with non-competitive elections. Exceptions were that NEOCH did a great deal of work in the 2005 competitive election for the Mayor of Cleveland.

We are grateful to the George Gund Foundation for their assistance in funding this project for voter engagement for the October early voting and Election Day activities. We also received support and outreach from State Voices to assist with both registration and mobilization activities. Finally, the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio provided support to assist in the summer 2012 to register voters and educate local social service providers about the importance of including voting activities in the work done by the agencies.

Larry Davis worked for Mature Services in Cleveland and was stationed at the NEOCH offices. He did a great deal of work on outreach and mobilization of the Alliance of Cleveland HUD Tenants building leaders as well as contacting every shelter in Cleveland to encourage voting. Larry spent countless hours contacting religious organizations and social service providers offering his help to register and drive people over to vote early. We could not have done as much as we did without Larry Davis. Gloria McCurdy, also of Mature Services did a great deal of work scouring the voter information documents from the Board of Elections to collect statistics on voting participation among lower income residents of the County.

We have to thank Cuyahoga County for being one of the only counties in the United States to prioritize voting activities within the publicly funded shelters. Every shelter is required to have a plan to register potential voters and then encourage them to vote. This involves having every shelter report on voting activities when they applying for public funds and then reporting on their successes every year with regard to voting. They are instructed to offer a voter registration card to everyone entering shelter. We thank Ruth Gillett, local director of the Cuyahoga County

Office of Homeless Services, who has made this a priority issue locally. It makes it much easier to develop effective plans, when the County makes this a priority issue that shelters must report. This is a model that should be replicated nationally, and we could not accomplish all that we do without the support and requirements put in place by Cuyahoga County.

Finally, all the shelters and Permanent Supportive Housing properties in Cleveland did their own work on behalf of registering and encouraging early voting. In Ohio, the Secretary of State reported that 71% of those registered to vote took the time to vote in the November election. The shelters were able to get 49% of those that used a shelter address in the summer of 2012 to cast a ballot. NEOCH registered 320 people and we were able to get 93% of those that we registered to actually vote in the November election. NEOCH did give out awards to the Salvation Army Railton Transitional House and MHS North Point Transitional Shelter for going above and beyond the requirements of Cuyahoga County to register and encourage voters to participate.

The shelters that participated in our efforts included: Bishop Cosgrove Center, 2100 Lakeside Shelter, Continue Life, Family Promise, Harbor Light, Salvation Army Pass, Salvation Army Zelma George, Hitchcock Center, Joseph's Home, Lakewood Community Service Center, Norma Herr Community Women's Shelter, North Point Transitional, North Star Re-Entry Center, Salvation Army Railton House, St. Herman's House of Hospitality, St. Malachi Homeless Services, Transitional Housing Inc., University Settlement, Volunteers of America/VA Domiciliary, West Side Catholic, and Y-Haven.

The Permanent Supportive Housing projects included Cogswell Hall, Famicos 1850 Superior, Edgewood Park, Emerald Commons, Greenbridge Commons, Liberty Commons, Northridge, and South Pointe all participated in our voting efforts. We also had support from some of the Alliance of Cleveland HUD Tenant groups with special thanks to St. Clair Place, Winton Manor, the Commodore, Erie Square, Jaelot, Notre Dame Apartments, and Fenway Manor. All of these tenant leaders were helpful in registering their residents and then getting them out to vote, especially during early voting.



Voter Registration Activities Presidential Election 2012

These are the activities undertaken by the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) in Cleveland from April 2012 through October 2012.

1. NEOCH Signed Up 670 people to register to vote.

We distributed 4,000 blank voter registration cards this summer to the local shelters, subsidized housing programs and public housing buildings. We sent a weekly e-mail from July through Golden Week to every shelter in Cleveland regarding voting changes, and to update staff about registration goals. We also sent an e-mail to the staff of the Permanent Supportive Housing Buildings every week with a goal of 100% residents participating—there are seven buildings in Cleveland, representing 450 tenants. Many of these PSH and subsidized buildings slipped the blank form under people's doors and some of them took the responsibility of getting the forms into the Board of Elections on their own. The shelters in Cuyahoga County are supposed to incorporate voter registration into their intake as part of Continuum of Care requirements. We then distributed blank voter registration cards and the current voter lists to the building leaders at the public, permanent supportive housing sites, and HUD funded buildings in Cuyahoga County. It was hoped that the tenant leader would focus attention on those not registered in their buildings from the lists we gave them. We know that we missed capturing the data from many registrations within the shelters that turned in the forms directly to the Board and from the individuals who used the addresses of family or friends because that is where they receive mail. We went back to pick up those completed voter registration forms and entered them in the statewide database. We turned them in on a weekly basis to pick up those completed registration documents, and then took them over to the Board of Elections. We sent our registered voters down to State Voices to be entered in their database. We attended tenant council meetings to encourage the building leaders to register people to vote and to check the current roles to see who is not registered including two workshops held with tenant leaders in Cleveland. We called every large apartment building in Cleveland by phone at least twice to encourage them to stage events around registering people to vote. We worked to get as many registrations from each of the buildings and shelters as possible.

2. We attended weekly meetings by telephone with State Voices and provided weekly updates.

NEOCH staff attended weekly calls to coordinate services with other State Voices Partners. We gave oral reports on the calls on a weekly basis to State Voices personnel.

3. NEOCH staff constructed a website dedicated to homeless participation in voting.

We constructed a special section of our website dedicated to homeless voting. We updated it weekly with events and tips for encouraging registrations. We had a special blog on our site that gave upcoming events, and we advertised all activities around the many voting lawsuits in Ohio. We regularly posted items on our advocacy newsletter about voting. We sent updated homeless voting information to every single homeless social service provider in Cuyahoga County at meetings and also dropped off literature. We created a brochure on the importance of voting for homeless people.

4. We continued to push our lawsuit with the State of Ohio on voter ID and won on appeal.
We worked with SEIU and other advocates on our settlement with the State of Ohio regarding the requirement to provide identification in order to vote. The state challenged our settlement in the form of a 2010 signed agreement. We worked with attorneys on this case including seeking additional plaintiffs this summer of individuals who wanted to vote in person, but may have a hard time getting identification. Subodh Chandra in Cleveland, Ohio represented the Coalition on this lawsuit and regularly engaged the State of Ohio in 2012 to protect access to the ballot box for those without identification. We monitored the agreement and we will continue to work with the ID collaborative on the issue of giving homeless people the opportunity to vote in person on Election Day. We publicized our victory in the media, and 40 papers across the United States covered the story, including a big article in August 28, 2012 in the *Washington Post*. We continue to negotiate an extension of the lawsuit past the current 2013 deadline for expiration of the agreement.

5. Assisted with a number of educational forums around non-profits and voting.
In working with the Office of Homeless Services, NEOCH staff held a one hour meeting to answer questions and encourage local homeless providers to assist their clients with voting. The April 19, 2012 forum, co-sponsored by the County Office of Homeless Services, had 33 people attend and we gave them each a sample of a plan for getting homeless people to vote. We reminded the shelter providers of the need to register people upon entry. We talked about our plans for “Golden week” and our “Get out the Vote” strategy. “Golden week” is a term advocates use to describe the week in Ohio in which there is an overlap in being able to register and vote at the same time. This is the best time to vote for people who move frequently such as homeless people. We asked for one staff to be appointed to be our liaison to the shelters. We continued to follow up with all the groups that attended this forum with weekly voting updates by e-mail. We worked with the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) on a forum in September to educate other non-profits about the procedure for helping homeless people to vote. We presented at the September County Office of Homeless Services Advisory meeting, attended by 30 local social service providers, about our plans for Golden Week to offer our help in getting people to vote during Golden Week. We had discussions about voting at all of our meetings that we attended in September including the outreach collaborative, the affordable housing alliance meeting, and the county homeless meetings. All of these have different constituents and different groups who may be able to help us with encouraging their constituents.

6. NEOCH staff worked on “Get out the Vote” campaign during Golden Week.
Golden week is the one week between when early voting starts (35 days before the Election Day) and when voter registration ends (30 days before the Election). In 2008, we had seven days because of the weekend voting, while in 2012 we only had five days for Golden week because the Secretary of State would not allow the Boards to open on the weekend or on Columbus Day. This decreased Golden week by 20% in Ohio for early voting. Previously, this was a local decision based on staffing and funding in each county. As we did in 2008, we worked with the local shelters and affordable housing buildings to have vans available to go to every shelter and day shelter to pick up homeless people and take them to the Board of Elections to vote. We transported 50 people to the polls ourselves from the shelters. We assisted some of the shelters that had their own transportation to take people to the polling

places, and we worked with Greater Cleveland Congregations to have people picked up from some of the larger apartment buildings. From the reports of the shelters provided, we helped 240 people to vote during Golden Week from the homeless programs either with our vans or those of our partners. We went to every single shelter and permanent supportive housing building in Cuyahoga County to offer rides.

7. NEOCH staff worked with NCH on National Homeless Voter week

The National Coalition for the Homeless had declared the last week of registrations September 30 to October 6 as Homeless Registration Week. This was during Golden Week and so we participated by driving people to the polls. We sent out a press release about our activities during National Homeless Voter week, but it did not get picked up by any media.

Voter Engagement Activities Through November 8, 2012

After the registration deadline, NEOCH focused our efforts on encouraging homeless people to get to polling places to vote. There is so much movement within the homeless shelters, housing programs, and supportive services that this is a major undertaking.

1. NEOCH staff assisted with transporting 220 people from the beginning of Golden Week through Monday November 5. We visited every shelter and every permanent supportive housing project in the community at least twice during these 35 days (36 locations). We hung up flyers at every large subsidized building in Cuyahoga County offering a ride. We drove a number of lower income tenants over to vote early. Our focus was encouraging early voting by homeless people in order to avoid the problem of homeless people having to show ID at the polling place on Election Day. In Ohio, an individual can use their social security number or state ID number to vote early while voting in person on Election Day requires the use of identification.
2. We communicated at least weekly with every shelter in an attempt to have staff encourage early voting. Two of the shelters had regular Thursday night voting discussions to complete their vote by mail ballots or all go over as a group to vote. Our biggest activity came the weekend before the November Election. We provided a large number of rides to voters on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday before the November election. In looking back at our numbers, of the 301 voters that we had registered, 77% of those individuals voted on the three days before the election, and only 2 voted on Election Day. We are fortunate that one of the Presidential candidates fought to get the polls open on that weekend, because many homeless individuals took advantage of this last weekend to vote.
3. We sent reminders by mail to the 324 people who we registered to vote. It is our understanding that COHHIO and State Voices also followed up with our voters to remind them to vote in the November election. This put our voters at a significant advantage over other homeless voters. This regular non-partisan contact with voters made a difference in raising participation rates.
4. We drove 37 people to their polling place or dropped off their absentee ballot at the Board of Elections on Election Day. We had 14 volunteers on Election Day help with

rides and talking to people about voting. They were willing to transport anywhere to assure the person voted in the Presidential election.

5. NEOCH worked with other groups on expanding the number of provisional ballots that would be counted with our lawsuit against the State of Ohio. While we lost the issue of counting those ballots submitted to the wrong precinct, we won all the other issues. We had a much higher percentage of provisional ballots counted in 2012 than we did in 2008. Many counties also had a much larger number of provisional voters submitted compared to 2008. This was a victory for getting every legitimate voter counted.
6. We regularly updated the voting section of our website with events and new information. This was especially important with the various lawsuits that resulted in last minute changes in the rules for voting. We published a number of stories on the site about people voting for the first time or overcoming great obstacles to vote (<http://www.nepoch.org/homeless-voting/>).
7. We submitted all of our data in an Excel spreadsheet to State Voices. We provided State Voices all of the addresses where we would be picking up voters to drive them to the Board of Elections. We attempted to coordinate voter pickups during early voting with other State Voices funded programs to provide every opportunity to our homeless voters to vote when it is convenient to them.
8. We attended the weekly voter engagement/turf coordination calls.

Statistics from the Shelters

Voting among the shelters of Cleveland generated some respectable numbers. This includes emergency shelters, transitional shelters and day shelters. This does not include the large number of people who registered at the shelter but use a different address to receive mail and vote. We can only track people who are using the shelters as their address and designate the shelter as their residence with the Board of Elections. The average number of beds are typically adult beds. The total number of voters in November 6, 2012 were only those who use that address as their voting residence. There were certainly others who voted but used a family or friends address because that is where they were receiving mail last year. We also found some changed their address a number of times because they were able to find stable housing over the summer. The number registered last summer are only those who used the shelter address. The total number who are registered at a shelter are most likely many people who have moved on, but did not change their address or did not inform the Board of Elections of their previous address and therefore are counted as new voters. This is not illegal unless they are voting at two different locations, which studies have shown is an incredibly small number of people out the millions who do vote. The purge of voters who do not vote is not done for four years and typically not during a major election. The figures listed for NEOCH may be duplicates of the shelter numbers since we picked up registrations from every shelter in the community. For the day shelters we listed the average number of meals served. For those with both shelter and day shelter we are combining the numbers of beds and meals.

Separately, we looked up the names of the 324 voter registration cards that we handled between July and October 2012. Of the 324 that NEOCH staff dropped off, 301 of those individuals voted either early or on Election Day, which translates to 93% participation. Only two of those whose registration NEOCH handled actually voted on Election Day, the other 299 voted early either by mail or at the Board of Elections. This shows that our constituents heard the message that it was better to vote early and it is much easier to vote either by mail or in person at the Board of Elections. The shelters had 264 people vote who used a shelter address in Cuyahoga County and registered between June and October 2012. Of those who registered using a shelter address and NEOCH did not handle, only 49% of those potential voters cast a ballot.

Name of Shelter	Kind of facility (transitional, emergency, day shelter)	Avg. No. of Beds/ meals	Total number of voters in 11/2012 at the shelter	No. register ed June to Oct. 2012	Number of new registrants who actually voted in 2012	Total Number who are registered at the shelter address	Percent- age of newly regist- ered who voted
2100 Lakeside Shelter	Emergency	400	128	208	75	980	36%
Bishop Cosgrove Cntr	Day Shelter	200	4	4	2	19	50%
Continue Life	Emgncy/Transitional	13	13	6	5	28	83%
Family Promise East	Transitional	15	8	11	6	19	55%
Family Promise West	Emergency	9	8	10	8	13	100%
Hitchcock Center	Transitional	41	17	16	9	58	56%
Joseph's Home	Transitional	11	5	3	1	9	33%
Norma Herr Women	Emergency	130	65	71	36	158	51%
North Point MHS	Transitional	90	36	29	15	143	52%
Salvation Army— Harbor Light	Transitional/ Emergency	200	56	64	33	292	52%
Salvation Army/Y- Haven	Transitional	200	74	46	33	233	72%
St. Herman's Shelter	Emergency	8	2	1	1	8	100%
Transitional Housing	Transitional	62	25	6	4	58	66%
Veterans Affairs TA	Transitional	25	10	9	9	14	100%
VOA—Domiciliary	Transitional	130	5	7	2	11	29%
VOA—152 nd St.	Transitional	53	15	11	7	44	64%
VOA—Walton	Emgncy/Transitional	55	9	15	7	51	47%
West Side Catholic**	Emgncy/Transitional /Day shelter	130	31	27	11	163	41%
Total		1673	511	544	264	2,301	49%
NEOCH	N/A	n/a	295	324	301	n/a	93%

** West Side Catholic is both a shelter and a drop in center in which people use their location as mailing address. There are many other homeless people living in the shelters who voted but did not use the shelter address.

NEOCH did a great deal of work with the Permanent Supportive Housing apartment buildings. We had weekly contact with their staff and regularly picked up their registration cards. These units are all single units and most are efficiencies, so each unit only has one voter. These are all the Permanent Supportive Housing units occupied in Cuyahoga County in 2012.

Permanent Supportive Housing Apartments

Name of Building	Owner	Number of Apt mnts	Total number of voters in Nov. 2012	% of Bldg. who voted in 2013	No. registered June to Oct. 2012	Number of new registrants who actually voted in 2012	Total Number who are registered at the building	% of new registered who voted
1850 Superior	Famicos	44	13	30%	12	5	46	42%
Cogswell Hall	Cogswell	41	23	56%	8	6	36	75%
Edgewood Park	EDEN Inc.	63	23	37%	24	11	50	46%
Emerald Commons	EDEN Inc	52	17	33%	13	6	42	46%
Greenbridge Commons	EDEN Inc	70	30	43%	28	16	54	57%
Liberty Commons	EDEN Inc	72	34	47%	27	15	72	55%
Northridge Commons	EDEN Inc	30	14	47%	7	6	19	86%
South Pointe	EDEN Inc	82	16	20%	14	7	49	50%
TOTALS		454	170	37%	133	72	368	54%

All the buildings with the exception of Cogswell Hall had a minority number of their residents vote in the Presidential election. Even with regular contact, NEOCH and staff were not able to register a majority of their tenants to encourage voter engagements. This is largely a disabled population, and it is going to require some creative thinking for how to achieve better participation.

Alliance of Cleveland HUD Tenants Buildings-Project Based Section 8 Bldgs

Name of Building	Number of apartments	Total Number of Voters in Nov. 2012	No. registered June to Oct. 2012	Number of new registrants who actually voted in 2012	Total Number who are registered at the building	% of new Registered who voted
Commodore	198	96	43	27	184	63%
Erie Square*	45	10	14	5	30	36%
Fenway Manor	143	89	16	10	132	63%
Jaelot	160	126	23	18	173	78%
Kirby Manor	202	112	34	22	161	65%
Notre Dame Apts.	52	45	3	3	66	100%
St. Clair Place	200	108	33	21	209	64%
Winton Manor	270	168	89	59	339	66%
TOTALS			255	165		65%

*Half of the 89 units were under construction in 2012

Ms. Meghee, tenant leader at the Winton Manor, did a great deal to get people to vote, and showed great success. She regularly updated her list of registered voters and encouraged those who were not registered to send in their form. She registered large numbers in the summer and a sizable percentage of those registered then voted. She deserves special credit for all the work that she did in registering and encouraging voting. This is only a sampling of the buildings that NEOCH worked with in 2012. These are the buildings that we had the most contact and involves most of the leadership of the Alliance of Cleveland HUD Tenants. Since there may be multiple adults in each unit it is impossible to give a total percentage for the building.

NEOCH was not able to have much contact with the Public Housing complexes in Cleveland, but they had impressive numbers of voters and registrants. We dropped off blank registration forms at every building, and we attempted to contact tenant leaders in each building but with little success. Even without our involvement, both senior only and multi-family units had nice voting numbers. Many of the large public housing facilities have polling places in the right inside their lobby. The sampling of public housing sites show that they vote in similar numbers as other voters throughout Ohio. Both multi-family and senior buildings have similar numbers of success in getting new voters to show up and vote. Typically, seniors have a higher percentage of voters when compared to younger family voters. This is a sampling of Public Housing properties.

Public Housing Buildings for Comparison (NEOCH had little contact)

Name of Building	Type of Housing	No. of Apartments	Total number of voters in 11/2012	No. registered June to Oct. 2012	Number of new registrants who actually voted in 2012	Total Number who are registered at the building	Percentage of new registered who voted
Beachcrest	Senior Only	234	90	18	11	137	61%
Bellaire Garden A	Multi Family	81	48	19	13	85	68%
Crestview	Multi Family	211	145	57	51	226	89%
Euclid Beach Gardens	Senior Only	148	89	28	17	122	77%
Riverview Tower	Senior Only	490	166	60	45	252	75%
Springbrook	Multi-Family	221	124	61	43	222	70%
Willson Tower	Multi-Family	237	129	71	45	267	63%
Total				314	225		72%

Challenges:

1. It was difficult competing with one of the national campaigns which routinely came to the shelters to register folks.
2. We could not figure out how to gain access to the Public Housing Buildings in Cleveland owned and operated by the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority. We tried, but failed to do outreach to these buildings.
3. A number of Permanent Supportive Housing properties tried to do their own campaigns without NEOCH on both registration and engagement. These were less successful than the buildings that worked with NEOCH. It must be noted that many of the permanent supportive housing residents are newly housed and have not addressed some of the problems that led to their homelessness in the first place. This is an extremely challenging population to serve.
4. There is a new process for entering shelter in Cleveland that began in 2012, and will be standard in other cities over the next few years. The concept is called “central intake” in which there is only one or two doors to enter any shelter in the City. So, there is one agency that does intake for every homeless person and then directs them to one of the open beds in the community. We could not get the staff of Central Intake to make a registration part of the intake process. Nearly every other shelter in the community participated, but this one agency did not. This was a big missed opportunity in the community.
5. The Ohio Secretary of State inconsistently enforced the rules for voting which put an additional barrier to low income voters participating. For example, Jon Husted claimed that he wanted a state standard for early voting hours and so adopted a standard of no weekend hours across the state. But when we pushed for a state standard for counting provisional ballots, he wanted that left to the local boards. He did not want to factor in population disparities when comparing county policies. This meant that limiting hours at the Boards of Election translated to 2 hour lines in urban counties and college towns, which are dominated by voters from the opposite party to the Secretary of State.
6. There is so much movement within the shelters that it should be standard policy to give out a blank registration to everyone discharged from the shelters. They could complete the form as they move into stable housing.
7. NEOCH wrote to the two agencies that did not participate in voting in Cuyahoga County and sent a copy to the County staff. All of the County funded shelters are required to assist with voting activities and have to report on this every year to the county staff. There were two agencies that did not respond to multiple attempts to engage them.

Successes:

1. We could not have driven the number of people we drove without the funds from State Voices and the Gund Foundation.
2. We recognized Ohio Senator Nina Turner as the NEOCH Advocate of the Year for all her work protecting access to the ballot box. She attended many of the demonstrations in front of the Board of Elections. She spoke out about expanding the number of voters instead of putting up barriers to access. Turner proposed many rules to expand access to voting, but was shut down in the Ohio Senate.

3. We made many new contacts with tenant leaders which we hope can improve our community organizing activities. We hope that they will become more engaged in preserving and expanding affordable housing opportunities for homeless people.
4. We had an excellent rate of voting from those we registered—far higher than the general population. This was due to the follow up done by NEOCH and our partners.
5. We did receive some local and national publicity about our activities, especially our victories in court. This has started to dispel some of the myths about homeless people in that they do vote and they care about civic life in our community.
6. We had regular contact with staff at the shelters, who would then pass the information on to their clients living at the shelters. We hope that this built a closer relationship with the shelter staff and administrators.
7. It was a good strategy to concentrate our work on the last four months before the election. Any thing done before July would result in the person having to change their address multiple times before the election.
8. We had some great personal stories of people crying in the van/cars of our volunteers because they had never voted before. This was rewarding for staff and homeless people who felt empowered and a little more like citizens of the United States even though they did not have housing.

“William took a young woman who had found housing over the last 30 days after being homeless for over a year. She was so worried because she wore a veil as a devout Muslim that they would not accept her identification or would make her take off her veil. The poll workers were so gracious and considerate, and this recently unhoused woman was so proud that she started crying in the car back to her apartment after she voted. We took another woman who became homeless in the last 30 days over to vote. She was forced to vote by a provisional ballot, because she had lost her residence. This was her first experience with voting in her life. She was told her ballot would take 10 days to count, she was still choked up that she was allowed to vote a provisional ballot in America even though she had no where to live on November 6. Larry took a Vietnam era veteran over to vote who had never voted in the past. He said he felt it was “a hassle,” but since all his buddies were going he decided to go vote. He registered and voted during Golden Week, and came away feeling that it was no big deal. Larry was proud to have a man who was struggling with housing after serving honorably in the US military was finally casting a ballot. ---taken from the NEOCH Blog at www.neoch.org.

Recommendations for Improving Voting:

Nationally

1. Every community in the United States should follow the Cuyahoga County lead and require their shelters to ask about voter registration when a new person enters. They should be measured on their success at changing registrations for people who are struggling with their housing. Since most shelters are publicly funded, we believe that they fall under the Motor Voter law from 1996. This could be a part of the federal HUD Continuum of Care funding process to require voter registration at the shelters. Shelters

- should be evaluated on their commitment to registering people to vote and report on those success as part of their annual progress report.
2. The undemocratic Electoral College should be eliminated so that the President is elected by national popular vote.
 3. Money is not speech. We need public financing of campaigns and guaranteed access by the candidates to the local and national television networks. We own the air waves, and they need to be given over to electing our leaders once a year for free.
 4. The United States should pass national standards for early voting as well as military voting and vote by mail provisions. Standards should be developed on previous felony convictions and participation in representative government that provides equal access throughout the United States. It is impossible to have a fair election for President when each state have their own rules with regard to ex-felon voting, early voting days, and vote by mail provisions. It is unfair for some states that take great care to accept ballots from military serving overseas while others make it difficult. People in Florida should not be treated so differently when compared to early voting in California when selecting a President of the entire United States.
 5. There should be free national identification that can be used for people to register to vote.
 6. No one should have to wait more than 20 minutes to vote in person, and this should be a national standard with consequences for long waits for states or jurisdictions.
 7. People should have to pay a special “Democracy tax” if they decide not to vote. This could be assessed when a person pays their income tax, and could pay for the public financing for campaigns.
 8. Voting should be done in whatever manner yields the most secure ballot with a paper backup and a way to count the ballots quickly, and there should be a national standard for voting with a goal of reducing the number of provisional ballots cast and increasing overall participation.

State of Ohio

9. Elimination of gerrymandering in the creation of legislative districts by removing it from the oversight by any one political party. There should be a law that both political parties including independents must come to a consensus on legislative districts, and should work to create compact, geographic centralized, racially sensitive districts, with party affiliation not be taken into account when designing legislature districts.
10. Ohio needs to maintain or expand “Golden Week” so that people who move frequently can register and vote at the same time. In a time when records can be viewed immediately, there is no reason to have such a long time in between the date registration closes and when voting begins. It is not until a person’s registration is verified that their vote will count. These rules for closing registration 30 days before the election were to serve County Boards of Elections transportation time in a paper based system with factoring in the US mail system. With e-mail, electronic records, registration data, citizenship, state identification, and age can be verified on the same day that the registration is completed. There should be standards for registering people to vote including the ability to register to vote on Election Day as exists in some states in the Union.
11. “Democracy Dies in the Dark” was the phrase used repeatedly by Federal District Court Judge Algenon Marbley in describing the activities of Secretary of State Jon Husted.

This had to do with last minute changes to the voting process right before deadlines without much public input. The Ohio Secretary of State should not be a political officeholder. The individual in charge of elections needs technical skills and should be above partisan politics. They should not be elected by popular vote, but should be appointed by a non-partisan panel that would also supervise statewide elections.

12. People should be allowed to vote a county wide ballot at any polling place if they do not want to cast a vote for local items or local elected officials.
13. Ohioans should be able to vote on a number of weekends before the election. This was valuable to homeless people who were willing to wait in a line for an hour or more in order to vote the weekend before the Election.

County

14. The Permanent Supportive Housing buildings in Cuyahoga County are all publicly funded and so should have staff evaluation that includes voter registration rates. As part of the yearly evaluation of the project, the success of the project should include the percentage of the building that voted in the elections. NEOCH should undertake staff training for all the agencies that interact with residents at the PSH buildings.
15. Every local board should be required to adopt rules to prevent long lines for voting. If County election staff report to a local hotline that a line has developed of more than 20 minutes, an emergency team should be deployed to reduce the line and open additional spaces for voters. This should occur in both early voting and on Election Day. Expanding early voting hours and vote by mail activities should reduce the possibility that there will be long lines.
16. Locally, housing advocates should plan for a city wide conference for tenant leaders in the first quarter of big elections to strategize about getting their residents to vote. It could be convened by the Mayor or County Executive to coordinate voting activities among low income voters. We should host a competition to get every building close to 100% registration rates, and then a competition on getting those voters to cast a ballot. We also need a better communication method with tenant leaders. They are an older population and are not necessarily online with e-mail and don't always have the ability to use social networking.
17. The Tenant Leadership in the Public Housing might be drafted into a campaign to get their residents of other apartment buildings to vote. The buildings with active and committed leadership did a far better job with turnout compared to those without strong leadership. Public housing leaders could be invited to the conference to teach other tenant leaders about how to oversee a campaign.
18. The local boards of elections should not be split by party. Partisan politics should not govern our local elections. The hours of operation, the rules for counting ballots, and the counting of provisional ballots should not be a partisan activity. We need independents represented who can fairly oversee the elections so that as many voters as possible participate, and not just as many partisans as possible vote.
19. Shelters should develop their own best practices for people who enter. They should try to figure out where the individual will most likely be on the next Election Day and register the individual based on that expectation. For example, transitional facilities should register everyone who enters at their location, while emergency shelters should try to find

an appropriate place in the community where the individual can receive mail and then send them out with a blank registration card when they are discharged.

20. All the shelters should construct a relationship with the local homeless coalition to collect registrations and have them delivered to the County Board of Elections. This assures that the application is returned in a timely manner, and the local Coalitions can follow up with these individuals to assure that they actually vote. Homeless people are at a disadvantage with regard to voting because all registration documentation is tied to a residence. Local Coalitions can provide additional assistance to remind those struggling with housing to vote and the rules regarding voter registration in each jurisdiction. Shelters should take advantage of this resources and personnel at the local homeless coalitions to assist with registration drives and voter engagement activities.

Voters in Cuyahoga County lined up for over an hour on the Saturday before Election Day 2012

