

Ohio canceled over 26,000 inactive voter registrations. Here's what you need to know

Haley BeMiller

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Secretary of State Frank LaRose purged over 26,000 inactive voter registrations last month as part of a process to update Ohio's voter rolls.

The move, which wasn't announced at the time, garnered attention last week when Rep. Bridget Rose Sweeney, D-Westlake, wrote LaRose a letter demanding answers about the process. A June directive from LaRose gave local boards of elections until Sept. 27 to cancel the registrations of voters who were inactive for at least four years.

At that point, the November election was technically underway. Military and overseas voting began Sept. 22.

Here's what voters need to know.

What does the process look like?

Federal law requires states to establish a program to routinely remove ineligible voters who died or moved out of state. The latest cycle dates back to 2019, when Ohio got data from the U.S. Postal Service on voters who moved and may have needed to update their registration.

A 2019 directive required boards to mail confirmation notices to those who moved to a new county or state. In an interview, LaRose said election officials watched for activity from these voters over the next four years, such as visiting the Bureau of Motor Vehicles or signing a petition. Boards mailed another notice to people on the list in March of this year.

Ultimately, registrations were tossed if the person hadn't voted since May 2019 and didn't respond to the notices. LaRose said 12 people replied to letters saying they still wanted to be registered to vote in Ohio.

"The last thing we want to do is unnecessarily remove someone from the voter rolls, and that's why we're so careful about this," he said.

Voting rights advocates question whether this process is the best way to clean up voter rolls. Even with the notifications, they contend it still leaves room for registrations to be canceled in error, without people realizing it.

"They get two notices in the mail that are written in arcane legalese and often don't make sense to voters," said Jen Miller, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio. "So this process is just incredibly ineffective. It's like using a hatchet rather than a surgical blade to make sure that we're only removing those individuals who have passed away or moved out of state."

How many registrations got canceled?

The state canceled 26,666 voter registrations. You can see the list at registrationreadiness.ohiosos.gov.

Three counties – Summit, Cuyahoga and Lucas – won't cancel registrations until after the Nov. 7 election. Counties were exempt from the Sept. 27 deadline if they had special or charter elections within 30 days of it.

Why did this happen in September?

LaRose's office could proceed with cancellations any time this year, as long as it wasn't within 30 days of an election. He initially gave boards a June deadline, but he bumped that to September after lawmakers set the Aug. 8 special election.

In her letter, Sweeney argued the timing was improper and hinted to LaRose's opposition of the abortion rights measure on the November ballot. But LaRose said waiting to cancel registrations after Nov. 7 would burden local boards that must process results and then accept candidate petitions in December for the March 2024 election.

"There's nobody who's left out of the process here," LaRose said. "It's just about balancing the workloads of the boards of elections."

The Ohio Association of Election Officials told LaRose's office that processing cancellations in September would be better than June, executive director Aaron Ockerman said.

Did people get enough notice?

LaRose's office published multiple directives on this process, as well as the [Registration Readiness list](#) that showed who was eligible for removal. They did not send out a news release before or after the cancellations took effect, as they have done in the past. LaRose did not indicate why that was the case.

Miller said better notice ensures the League and other groups can help people re-register, if needed.

"We also know there can be a lot of mistakes made," Miller said. "We would like to see the secretary be incredibly transparent about who is being removed from the voter rolls simply for not voting because we are concerned that voter registration vendors could make mistakes and people could wrongfully be removed."