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An Open Letter to the Mahoning County Board of Elections

Regarding the Selection of a New Board of Elections Facility

Dear Members of the Mahoning County Board of Elections:

The Mahoning County Board of Elections serves one of the most important functions in our democracy: ensuring that every eligible citizen has fair, equal, and convenient access to the electoral process. As the Board considers a new location for its offices, we respectfully encourage its members to remain focused on the mission they have been entrusted to uphold—serving the people of Mahoning County with accessibility, transparency, and responsible stewardship of public resources.

Under Ohio law, county boards of elections are entrusted with administering elections fairly, impartially, and efficiently for the benefit of all eligible voters. Those responsibilities extend beyond Election Day. They include ensuring that the Board's services remain reasonably accessible to the public and that administrative decisions reinforce public confidence in the integrity of our electoral system. Likewise, the principles reflected in the federal voting rights framework remind us that unnecessary barriers to participation should be minimized and that public institutions should strive to make access to voting services as equitable and practical as possible. While selecting an office location is an administrative decision, it is also one that can have a meaningful impact on the public's ability to participate fully in our democracy.

The Board's office is not simply another government building. It is where residents register to vote, cast early ballots, obtain election information, submit candidate petitions, file election-related documents, and receive assistance regarding one of our most fundamental constitutional rights. Because this facility exists to serve the public, its location should place the public's needs at the center of the decision-making process.

We believe the office space available at **Cobbin Towers, 1350 Fifth Avenue, Youngstown**, deserves serious consideration. Based on the information available, the facility appears to satisfy the Board's stated specifications while also offering substantial benefits to the citizens of Mahoning County.

We respectfully encourage the Board to evaluate every proposed location using objective, transparent, and publicly understood criteria, including accessibility by public transportation, compliance with operational requirements, parking availability, accessibility for individuals with disabilities, overall cost to taxpayers, and the ability of the location to equitably serve residents throughout Mahoning County. A transparent evaluation based upon these considerations will strengthen public confidence in the Board's decision while demonstrating its commitment to fairness, accountability, and good government.

Cobbin Towers stands out because it appears to satisfy these important considerations. Located on the WRTA bus line in the heart of Youngstown, it provides convenient access for residents who rely on public transportation, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, students, working families, and citizens who do not own personal vehicles. Accessibility is not merely a matter of convenience—it is an essential component of ensuring that every eligible voter has a meaningful opportunity to participate in the democratic process.

Fiscal responsibility is equally important. If Cobbin Towers already meets the Board's operational requirements, selecting a facility that minimizes renovation and build-out costs represents sound stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Every dollar saved allows public resources to be used more efficiently while reinforcing the Board's responsibility to make prudent financial decisions on behalf of the citizens it serves.

For more than a century, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has championed equal access to the ballot and the principle that democracy is strongest when every eligible citizen can participate fully and without unnecessary barriers. The Youngstown Branch of the NAACP believes that access to voting must be practical as well as protected by law. Decisions regarding public facilities should therefore be guided by the principle of removing barriers—not creating them—and by ensuring that government remains accessible to every member of the community regardless of income, age, disability, or means of transportation. Public trust is earned when government decisions reflect openness, accessibility, accountability, and thoughtful stewardship of public resources. We respectfully ask the Mahoning County Board of Elections to keep these principles at the forefront as it determines the future home of the Board. This decision is about more than office space; it is about demonstrating a commitment to every voter in Mahoning County and ensuring that the institution responsible for administering our elections remains readily accessible to the people it serves.

History will remember not simply where the Board chose to locate its offices, but whether that decision reflected a commitment to expanding access, strengthening public trust, exercising responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources, and serving every voter in Mahoning County. We respectfully urge you to make a decision that reflects these enduring principles and leaves a legacy of accessibility, accountability, and service for generations to come.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter and for your continued service to the citizens of Mahoning County.

Respectfully submitted,

NAACP Youngstown Branch

Advocates for Equal Access, Civic Engagement, and Voting Rights