



Ohio

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Testimony by Catherine Turcer, Common Cause Ohio
SB 186 Proponent Testimony
February 25, 2020

My name is Catherine Turcer and on behalf of Common Cause Ohio, Fair Districts = Fair Elections Coalition, and Ohio Voter Rights Coalition, I am pleased to submit testimony in support of Voter Verification and Registration (VVR).

Automatic Voter Registration, similar to the proposed Senate Bill 186, is an innovative policy that streamlines the way Americans register to vote. This policy makes two simple, yet transformative changes to the way our country has traditionally registered voters. First, Automatic Voter Registration makes voter registration “opt-out” instead of “opt-in”—eligible citizens who interact with government agencies, such as the Bureau of Motor Vehicles are registered to vote or have their existing registration updated, unless they affirmatively decline. Again, the voter can opt-out; it is not compulsory registration. Second, those agencies transfer voter registration information electronically to election officials instead of using paper registration forms. These common-sense reforms increase registration rates, clean up the voter rolls, and save states money.

Automatic Voter Registration which is called by different names, including Motor Voter 2.0, is gaining momentum across the country. To date, [16 states and D.C.](#)¹ have approved similar policies, meaning that over a third of Americans live in a jurisdiction that has either passed or implemented AVR.

¹ Brennan Center, History of AVR & Implementation Dates (Published: June 19, 2019, Updated: January 17, 2020) <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/automatic-voter-registration-summary>

As this committee continues to finalize the details of SB 186, we urge the following recommendations be adopted:

- Establish an opt-out procedure for new and existing registrants to maximize the efficiencies of Voter Verification and Registration. All eligible citizens should be registered or have their registration updated, unless they affirmatively opt-out.
- Establish clear and concise language on the electronic display and/or acknowledgement notice so that the public can knowingly opt-out of registration.
- Establish rules and procedures that rely on government documents like birth certificates, passports, or naturalization papers to ensure only eligible citizens are registered through the Voter Verification and Registration system.
- Adopt a hold-harmless provision for registrants who are mistakenly registered through Voter Verification and Registration, through no-fault of their own.
- Remove party-affiliation from the Voter Verification and Registration process.
- Create an advisory committee consisting of bipartisan election officials, Bureau of Motor Vehicles registrars, and voter advocates to begin planning for Voter Verification and Registration implementation. The biggest challenge to successful implementation has been lack of coordination and it's important to start our implementation process off on the right foot. This will help prevent problems that occurred in other states.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on this important reform. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.