

Written Testimony in Opposition to Sub HB 294
Government Oversight Committee
Ariel Miller
Dec. 6, 2022

Dear Chairman Wilkins, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Committee

I am writing as a 70-year-old white Christian voter and lifelong lover of participatory democracy to ask you to defeat Sub HB 294. This bill damages our electoral processes, which were not broken. It creates new and needless hurdles to voter participation, particularly for low-or moderate-income Ohioans who are struggling to survive inflation and the logistical challenges of juggling work, child care, and in some cases age, disability, and lack of access to transportation.

During the 2020 pandemic and general election, I and several other Episcopalians in Greater Cincinnati studied voting rules and the options offered by the State of Ohio to ensure that all who wished to vote could do so safely during the pandemic. We carried out nonpartisan outreach to make sure as many people as possible in our community knew about early voting, how to complete absentee ballots so they would be counted, and how to turn them in at county Boards of Election so they would be received on time despite that year's serious uncertainties about on-time delivery through the US Postal Service. I respected Secretary of State LaRose's diligence in communicating about how to use these options, and his standing up for Ohio voters by attesting to the accuracy of the election results.

I was very proud in 2020 to be an Ohioan in a state where people of both major parties incredibly hard together – risking their own health -- to ensure a fair and safe election. As a Christian who strives to see every other person as equally dear to God, I am ashamed to see how Sub HB 294 communicates clearly to poor people that the bill's sponsors don't want voting to be convenient for them. Curtailing early voting, limiting drop-boxes and the time period for returning absentee ballots, and increasing the burden of proving identity all convey that message. These dog whistles – plus the odious plan of adding “non-citizen” to state IDs of those who are not – are heard clearly by poor and vulnerable people as intimidation. They certainly don't have anything to do with fair elections. In 2020, the Republican leadership in Ohio did not need to curtail voting to ensure that President Donald Trump won here. In 2022, the Republican leadership of our state did not need to resort to the barriers in this bill to get Governor DeWine and the other statewide incumbents re-elected.

HB 294 started out with some good elements – expanding the forms of acceptable proof of identity, and authorizing automatic voter registration and updates through the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. But the amended bill abandons those reforms which will save voters time and money and allow boards of election to use their own staff and budget more efficiently to run elections. Instead, the sub bill would make it unnecessarily expensive and time-consuming for people to

drop off absentee ballots by restricting drop-boxes to only one location per county at a time when Ohioans who can't afford efficient new cars have been struggling to pay for gasoline.

I served in this year's general election as a non-partisan election protection volunteer at three polling places in Cincinnati. I was so proud of Ohio when I learned about the option of curbside voting for voters who were unable to physically access their polling place. An official from each party would bring the ballot out to the voter as a team. The sub bill rules that option out.

The amendment which would brand legal permanent residents as non-citizens on their state ID is DANGEROUS because of the rising level of xenophobia in our state and the increasing prevalence of hate crimes against immigrants. I deplore this as a person of faith, keenly remembering how the Jews fled slavery in Egypt and the infant Jesus and his family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous rage. But I also feel this pain personally, even as an American citizen born in the United States. My Swiss father, American mother, and three-year-old sister were briefly homeless refugees fleeing Singapore at the start of the Second World War. They barely escaped death on their voyage through straits where they could hear Japanese troops conversing. They were welcomed and aided in Australia by strangers who loaned them the money to get to my aunt's home in the State of Washington. My parents never had to worry about Australians wanting to kill them for being foreigners. Our nation's current reality is quite different. Adding the non-citizen label to a state ID puts people who live and work legally in Ohio at risk of violence.

Please, please defeat this shameful legislation.

Sincerely,
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