

Good Afternoon Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and other representatives on the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee.

My name is Ifeolu Claytor. I come from Shaker Heights, OH, where I serve on Shaker Heights City Council. I also serve as the Political Action Chair of the Cleveland NAACP. Professionally, I work in Civic Engagement and Voting Rights. Currently, I work to get out the vote across 25 states with a national civic-engagement non-profit, and before that, I spent 2 years with All Voting is Local - Ohio. Despite the many hats I wear, I am here representing myself and Ohio Voters. I stand here today in opposition to Ohio House Bill 294.

As with most anti-voter bills, this bill is a solution in search of a problem. It does nothing to fix the security of our elections, because our Secretary of State assures voters every year that our Elections are secure. It instead works to make voting more difficult for ALL Ohio voters. In 2020, voters took advantage of the opportunity to vote by mail, much more than in prior years. Some of our voters have chosen to stick with this trend, acknowledging the ease and accessibility - but cutting time for requesting and returning ballots does not help anyone.

One of the best parts about voting by mail is the ability to drop off your ballot at a secure ballot drop box. While it would be beneficial to rural, suburban, and urban voters alike to increase the amount of secure drop boxes per county, House Bill 294 looks to restrict availability and locations. Let me be clear, in some counties, voters may have to drive up to an hour to get to a secure drop box, whereas in others without adequate or accessible transportation, voters still have difficulty regardless of location.

Photo identification is another component of House Bill 294. State issued photo ID's are not free, and not easily accessible. As any Ohioan knows, when it comes time for your birthday, four years after you last renewed your license, you may almost dread the upcoming birthday, knowing that you will have to wait in a Bureau of Motor Vehicles for a period of time that could easily be unreasonable. In a world where time is money, and state issued identification isn't free. I would argue that this is a double poll-tax that the state legislature is attempting to put on Ohio voters.

Understanding all of this, the only question that I ask is Why? Working in the non-partisan civic engagement space, and having worked the Election Protection program for a number of years, I often hear of states where legislatures are known for trying to make voting nearly impossible for personal/partisan gain. And again, I have to ask, why are we here - doing this? There is a mantra that some in this room continue to state, and it's "easier to vote but harder to cheat". I ask, when the 2020 Election results were approximately 99% accurate, who is cheating? Last year, Ohio saw an unconstitutional map that was forced through by one party - the same one pushing this anti-voter bill. Less than 1 month after this same party handily won all of the statewide offices with no acception, I ask again, who is cheating. Many of you may be familiar with me because as a political science student at Miami University, I visited this statehouse at least annually - one thing I learned in my studies is to back up my opinions with evidence and research. I wish that my legislators were doing the same here.

I'll end my testimony with just one anecdote. I returned this morning from Georgia, where I worked with other non-partisan groups to encourage people to get out and vote. Last night, the re-elected Sen. Warnock noted in his victory speech

- that some in Georgia and across the country will point to the victory as evidence that there is no voter suppression in Georgia, but to be clear - the millions of Georgians who endured various suppression tactics to have their voices heard, to disallow their voices from being silenced.

I ask you not to follow in the footsteps of your counterparts in other states, to allow Ohioans a Freedom to Vote, instead of restricting them and burdening them with suppressive tactics. I stand with the people, who would like their voices heard, and who would prefer to not have to fight to have access to their democracy. Thank you.