



Cecil Thomas
State Senator
9th District

Ohio Statehouse
Senate Building, Room 228
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-5980
Thomas@ohiosenate.gov

Committees:

- Judiciary – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid – *Ranking Minority Member*
- Government Oversight and Reform
- Health, Human Services, and Medicaid
- Local Government, Public Safety, and Veterans Affairs
- Rules and Reference

Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
SB 303 Sponsor Testimony

Chairwoman Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Senate Local Government & Elections Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on Senate Bill 303, which will require the names of individuals submitted by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to be included on the juror list.

Current Ohio law requires jury commissioners to select jurors from a list of registered voters as provided by the county board of elections. The law permits, but does not require, jury commissioners to additionally select jurors from a list of Ohioans who possess a driver's license, a process that in many counties excludes those that who have a driver's license but are not registered to vote.

Senate Bill 303 would amend section 2313.06 of the Revised Code to require that the annual jury source list compiled by the jury commissioners include the list of names submitted by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. The list provided by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles would then be merged with the list provided by the county board of elections, with any duplicates being removed, in order to create a more comprehensive list of Ohioans eligible to serve as jurors. In effect, the process of selecting jurors would give an equal chance of selection to any county resident who meets the following criteria:

- The person has been issued a driver's license, commercial driver's license, or state identification card that is valid on the date the jury source list is compiled;
- The person is or will be 18 years old or older on the day of the general election of the year in which the jury source list is filed;
- The person, regardless of whether they are actually registered to vote, would be an elector if the person was eligible to vote.

I believe that the current selection process of using voter registration to compile juror lists has not been sufficient in creating diverse jury pools. Ohio and Wyoming are the only two states that require the

use of voter registration rolls alone. Many states have abandoned this method as it does not allow the maximum number of Ohio residents to be selected for jury service and disproportionately affects those less likely to register to vote, most notably minorities and low-income communities.

Absence from the list of registered voters does not mean a citizen is unengaged or incompetent, and should not prevent them from serving as a juror. As long as Ohio purges its voter registration list of temporarily inactive voters, many people will be unwittingly excluded from this vital civic duty. Disillusionment with politics and recent elections does not preclude one from assessing the guilt and innocence of their peers.

In analyzing the judicial process and improvements to be made, the Supreme Court of Ohio's Task Force on Jury Service put forth the specific recommendation of utilizing combined lists of registered voters and licensed drivers for the purposes of juror selection – a recommendation that matches the aim of this bill. The concept of juries containing peers was designed so that defendants may receive a fair judgment by fellow citizens that are representative of the community in which they live. The main objective in compiling a master list of eligible jurors is to create an inclusive, comprehensive list of those citizens; broadening the use of juror source lists according to Senate Bill 303 would allow more residents the opportunity to be selected, thus increasing the likelihood that the jury pool will be an adequate representation of the community.

Chairwoman Gavarone and members of the committee, thank you again for allowing me to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 303. I strongly urge you to consider this measure to ensure inclusive and representative jury selection processes and I would be happy to take any questions at this time.