

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 472
House Homeland Security Committee
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Thank you, Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas and all members of the Homeland Security Committee for giving me the opportunity to present my testimony on House Bill 472, the Ohio Votes Count Act.

I am submitting my written testimony to you today to humbly urge you to support HB472 Ohio Votes Count Act. The Ohio voter roles continue to be threatened by the abuses of people registering to vote at the time of obtaining a driver's license. When applying for the license, they are given the opportunity to register to vote whether they are a citizen or a non-citizen. There is no verification. They are also able to register online or by filling out paperwork. Again, no verification is done and they are added to the Ohio voter role even if the BMV receives information that the person is a non-citizen because federal law requires that the person is to be given the opportunity. Only US citizens should be eligible to vote, period.

An article by NPR titled "Some Noncitizens Do Wind Up Registered To Vote, But usually Not On Purpose" by Pam Fessler dated February 26, 2019, illustrates my point in detail and shows that this has been an ongoing issue for decades.

From that article: "About five years ago, immigration attorneys started contacting Pennsylvania election officials to report that many of their clients had gone to get a driver's license and, a few weeks later, received a voter registration card in the mail. Sundrop Carter, executive director of the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition, says it was especially disturbing for immigrants who were trying to become citizens." "I received this in the mail, I don't know why," she says they would tell their lawyers. "I didn't think I was eligible to register to vote. Am I actually? Should I go vote?" "The answer was definitely "No." That would be illegal (noncitizens are not eligible to vote in federal elections, but a handful of jurisdictions allow them to vote in some local races).

Since 1995, federal law has required states to offer people a chance to register to vote when they visit a local motor vehicle office.

But it turns out that Pennsylvania, like some other states, was asking that question of everyone who applied for a driver's license or state ID card — even those showing green cards or other documents identifying them as noncitizens.

That is often confusing for immigrants who come in to get a driver's license or ID, which noncitizens are eligible to do.

Immigrants like Asife, who lived in Pennsylvania on a student visa in the early 2000s, were confused by the process of getting a driver's license and accidentally registered to vote. (NPR is not using his full name because what he did was technically illegal, and he's concerned about the repercussions in his community.)

"When I come here, I have no English language at all, like I barely, like you know, have some words," he says.

He didn't understand what the clerk was asking him, especially because Asife came from a country where elections are seldom held.

"The guy there didn't explain what is the 'vote,' what I should do? He just look at the screen and he told me, 'Okay, so answer this question.' And like I have no clue," says Asife.

He signed the form and forgot about it until he applied for citizenship seven years later and learned he was illegally registered to vote. As if he never actually voted and was able to become a U.S. citizen.”

Ohio HB472 will address issues just like this. It will require that every applicant’s identity and US citizenship is verified BEFORE adding them to the Ohio voter roles. The voter registration information will require validation and will ensure the eligibility of the person seeking the right to cast a vote. These are very simple and very necessary steps that are needed to regain integrity in our elections.

I want to sincerely thank Representative Willis and Representative Peterson for sponsoring HB472 and fervently urge this committee to move HB472 to the House floor and get it passed as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue that is of vital importance to me and to all citizens of Ohio.