

House General Government Committee

November 18, 2025

Amended Senate Bill 293 Proponent Testimony

Chairwoman Ray, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the Ohio House General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee in support of Amended Senate Bill 293.

It has long been the sole authority of the General Assembly to set the “time, place, and manner” of Ohio’s elections, and it is my job to carry out the law. From that perspective, I view my role in this process to be an advisor on what works and does not work in the administration of Ohio’s elections.

Having reviewed the proposed legislation before you, I believe these reforms can be implemented in accordance with the terms and timelines prescribed in the bill. I would like to discuss three of its key provisions here today.

Ballot Return Deadline

First, Ohio must require that ballots returned by mail be received by Election Day. This is a common-sense policy already used in 34 other states, and making this change eliminates unnecessary voter confusion about deadlines and outcomes.

Ohio prides itself on reporting the unofficial results of our elections within a few hours after polls close on Election Day, but the uncertainty of late-arriving ballots in a close contest can damage voter confidence in the outcome.

We should reconcile Ohio law with more than two-thirds of the nation by requiring ballots cast by mail to be returned with the rest of our electorate – on Election Day. As a member of our nation’s military, I am well aware of the difficulties sometimes presented by voting from overseas, so I asked that an exemption be included in this bill for military and overseas voters. That language is included before you.

I also support this change due to the uncertainty surrounding pending litigation at the national level. First, I was contacted several weeks ago by the United States Department of Justice. Attorneys for the Department suggested to my legal team that federal litigation would be filed against Ohio to challenge our current ballot return policy. At that time, I asked for the opportunity to address this matter through legislation rather than litigation, and the Department agreed to this approach.

Since I started this conversation, the United States Supreme Court has announced its intention to hear a case related to this issue next year, and that decision is likely to be announced next summer.

Any decision that conflicts with current state law has the potential to disrupt our voting process. Should the court find that federal law conflicts with Ohio law, we could face the confusing and costly outcome of having to use bifurcated ballots. This means we would either need to provide separate ballots for state and federal races altogether or completely reprogram our tabulation systems in all 88 counties, allowing for late-arriving votes to be processed for state and local races but not for federal races. As you can imagine, administering that process would be incredibly confusing for both voters and election officials.

I believe the best course of action is to clearly state what most people will see as common sense: with few exceptions, ballots should be cast and counted on Election Day.

This is not a disruptive change. Excluding overseas and military voters, fewer than 8,000 ballots were returned after Election Day in last year's presidential election. That is a tenth of one percent out of more than 5.8 million total ballots cast. I am absolutely confident in the intelligence of Ohio voters and their ability to adapt their behavior to the new deadline if it changes. My office and the 88 county boards of elections will do everything we can to inform voters of the change. Again, it is not a disruptive change to make, but doing nothing today could be incredibly disruptive to the voting process next year.

Correcting Erroneous Registration Data

The second reform I'd like to address is the process for correcting problematic voter registration records. Amended Senate Bill 293 would ensure that Ohio continues its well-deserved reputation for having the most effective voter list maintenance program in the nation.

The bill enhances the process used by county boards of elections to identify and remedy mismatched records in the voter registration database. These mismatches are flagged when a registration fails to match other government records for fields such as a date of birth, driver license number, or Social Security number.

Under the new law, a voter would be sent a correction form with a postage-paid return envelope. If the voter fails to respond to that mailing, they would be required to cast a provisional ballot at the next election. By providing the necessary identifying

information on the provisional ballot, the voter can then correct the registration and restore it to active status. If the voter fails to take either of these actions, the registration would be eligible for removal from the rolls.

At no point would a voter be denied the right to vote. A voter who fixes the problematic registration by returning the correction form would be able to cast a regular ballot in the next election.

However, if the voter chooses to fix the registration by voting a provisional ballot, they must do so in person to provide the necessary correcting information.

We must do everything possible to ensure the accuracy of our voter file. Allowing mismatched registration records to go unresolved falls short of Ohio's high standards for election integrity. This reconciliation process is an effective way to address the issue, while still upholding the fundamental right of every eligible voter to cast a ballot.

Voter Verification

Finally, the third request I made of the General Assembly is to clearly state in Ohio law our process for using federal government records to verify voter registrations.

Thanks in large part to the efforts of Ohio and my administration, the federal government is now providing states with expanded access to the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) database.

The Secretary of State utilizes SAVE records to provide boards of elections with a more frequent voter registration verification process, specifically verifying citizenship status through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and death status through the Social Security Administration.

Federal law clearly gives states the right to use these federal government records for voter verification purposes, and my office filed litigation against the Biden administration to secure this data access. We were joined by several other states in successfully making that case.

While the prior administration refused to provide reasonable access to SAVE, the current administration has not only granted that access but is also working directly with Ohio to develop a data verification process tailored to our unique needs. As a result, we are now able to conduct ongoing verifications on all new voter registrations, rather than conducting an annual review as required by state law.

Amended Senate Bill 293 more succinctly codifies my office's current process under the law and ensures that future secretaries of state continue to use this resource to conduct Ohio's comprehensive voter list maintenance procedures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am confident that Republicans and Democrats share the goal of ensuring accurate voter rolls. Amended Senate Bill 293 codifies the common-sense policies needed to ensure that Ohio's elections remain secure, accessible, and transparent.

I want to thank House leadership, and particularly Representative Peterson, for helping to get this important legislation to this point, and I greatly appreciate the partnership we have with the House of Representatives in making Ohio the gold standard for secure, accurate, and accessible elections.

I am happy to take any questions you might have at this time.



Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State