

May 24, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and members of the Senate General Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Elena Klingler, and I am an Ohioan and a student at the University of Akron. I serve as an advocate for voter engagement on campus at UA, but write to you today solely on behalf of myself as an individual. As a citizen of Ohio concerned with the voting rights of my fellow students and Ohioans, I am writing to express my opposition to SB 153 and its companion HB 233. SB 153 will make it substantially more difficult for honest Ohio voters to make their voices heard at the ballot box, a price unwarranted given the rarity of voter fraud and the safeguards Ohio already has in place.

First, the bill weakens Ohio's petition process, a means of direct democracy that Ohioans hold dear. It requires petition circulators to relinquish their rights against self-incrimination and eliminates the ability for respondents to register to vote or update their registration and sign a petition at the same time. These changes unnecessarily complicate the petition process and disincentivize Ohioans from full civic engagement.

The bill also places significant burdens on our Boards of Elections that will hurt both election workers and voters. The changes to the petition review process and the citizenship verification process create new requirements for Boards of Elections that are not coupled with additional support. Moreover, the bill eliminates unattended ballot drop-boxes, which will require more election workers to be available to accept ballots, and deprive Ohioans who are otherwise occupied during working hours of the convenience and confidence of delivering their ballots directly to the Boards.

Finally, the bill's new documentary proof of citizenship requirement places an unjustified burden on Ohio voters. Under SB 153, Ohioans will need to provide documentary proof of citizenship before their votes can be counted. This additional barrier will particularly impact rural Ohioans, married women, and college students. Out of around 8 million registered Ohioans, Secretary LaRose identified only 138 individuals for potential noncitizen voting in an investigation last year,¹ and Attorney General Yost secured indictments for only 6.² In contrast, over 9% of voting-age American citizens do not have ready access to documentary proof of citizenship, according to a survey conducted by the University of Maryland,³ which would be over 800,000 voting-age

¹ "Secretary LaRose Refers Evidence of Non-Citizen Voter Registrations to Ohio Attorney General for Potential Prosecution," Ohio Secretary of State, August 21, 2024, <https://www.ohiosos.gov/media-center/press-releases/2024/2024-08-21>.

² "Grand Juries Indict 6 for Illegal Voting," Ohio Attorney General, October 22, 2024, <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Media/News-Releases/October-2024/Grand-Juries-Indict-6-for-Illegal-Voting>.

³ Jillian Andres Rothschild, Samuel B. Novey, and Michael J. Hanmer. "Who Lacks ID in America Today? An Exploration of Voter ID Access, Barriers, and Knowledge," *University of Maryland Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement*, (June 2024), <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/pubs/Voter%20ID%20survey%20Key%20Results%20June%202024.pdf>.

Ohioans. That's over 133,000 Ohioans potentially disenfranchised for every 1 noncitizen indicted. This is an unacceptable trade-off.

Protecting the security of our elections is a noble goal. However, as is the case with so many government actions, concerns of security and concerns of liberty must be balanced. This bill would place substantial roadblocks in front of one of the most fundamental rights we have as Americans in the service of solving an undeniably marginal issue that Ohio already prioritizes. Ohio's elections should be fair AND free. I urge you to further consider the consequences of this bill and vote no on SB 153.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Elena Klingler

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