

May 25, 2025

Senate General Government Committee
Ohio Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: OPPOSITION to Senate Bill 153

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

My name is Christopher Stevens and I am a resident of The Village of Indian Hill in Cincinnati. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 153.

This massive bill would make sweeping changes to over 40 sections of Ohio law governing voting and elections, while creating three entirely new sections. These changes would make it harder for eligible citizens to vote, harder to collect petition signatures, and would place significant administrative and financial burdens on our county boards of elections—all without providing additional resources to implement these changes.

As someone who has volunteered in citizen-led petition campaigns, I am particularly concerned about the provisions targeting petition circulators. When I collected signatures, I proudly wore a t-shirt identifying the cause I supported. I'm concerned about the vague definition of "compensated" circulators in this bill. Would volunteers who receive campaign materials like t-shirts now be classified as "paid circulators" subject to these additional restrictions and identification requirements? This ambiguity could have a chilling effect on volunteer participation in the democratic process.

The proposed "documentary proof of citizenship" requirements would create needless difficulties for families like mine. My wife took my last name when we married, which means her birth certificate no longer matches her current legal name. Under SB 153, she and millions of other married women in Ohio would be forced to provide additional documentation or risk having their voter registration rejected or their votes not counted.

Evidence from other states that have tried similar approaches, such as Kansas, demonstrates the harmful impact of such requirements. Kansas attempted to implement a similar law and found that 12% of eligible voters—approximately 31,000 Kansans—were prevented from registering to vote before the law was struck down by a federal court in 2018. In Ohio, this requirement would likely prevent tens of thousands of eligible voters from casting ballots.

The bill would create significant hardships for many Ohioans:

1. Married women who have changed their names would face difficulties because their names would not match their birth certificates.
2. Young people and those with limited financial resources would be disproportionately affected, as many do not possess passports or readily available birth certificates.
3. Voters with mismatched data between the Board of Elections and BMV records (such as a missing middle initial or recent address change) would be forced to cast provisional ballots, potentially leading to their votes not being counted.
4. The bill creates an arduous process for verifying citizenship that would effectively eliminate voter registration drives and online registration.
5. The proposed requirement that voters respond to confirmation notices within 14 days or face prosecution is extraordinarily punitive and would likely intimidate eligible voters from registering at all.

Furthermore, the bill would ban all ballot drop boxes, even those outside county Boards of Elections. This would create long lines and make it more difficult for working Ohioans, students, and parents to return their ballots.

Our current voting systems already have robust safeguards to ensure election integrity. Ohio's election officials work diligently to maintain accurate voter rolls and verify voter eligibility. In 2021, Ohio Secretary of State, Frank LaRose, said: ““Early last year we set a clear mission -- that Ohio voters would be confident their voice was heard in an honest election. The incredible accuracy of the results as reflected in the post-election audits should make every Ohioan proud not only of their bipartisan election officials, but of the system we have in place. Ohio ran a fair and accurate election.”

This bill creates solutions to problems that do not exist, while creating real barriers for eligible Ohioans who wish to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 153 and instead focus on legislation that would strengthen our democracy by making it easier—not harder—for eligible Ohioans to participate in our electoral process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Christopher Stevens
8050 N Clippinger Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45243