

Opponent Testimony on Senate Bill 153

Submitted to the Ohio Senate General Government Committee

Jean Henderson

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Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong opposition to Senate Bill 153.

My name is Jean Henderson, and I am a concerned Ohioan. I volunteer with nonpartisan organizations dedicated to strengthening civic engagement and ensuring every eligible Ohioan has the freedom to vote. SB 153 threatens that freedom.

This bill imposes new, restrictive proof-of-citizenship requirements for voter registration—requirements that will make it significantly harder for many eligible Ohioans to register and vote. Women, particularly those who have changed their names due to marriage or divorce, could face increased scrutiny and obstacles in producing matching documentation. Elderly voters who no longer drive may struggle to obtain the necessary documents. Low-income Ohioans may be unable to afford the cost or navigate the process of obtaining official paperwork.

The bill would also disproportionately harm naturalized citizens, rural residents, and those who were born in areas where birth records may be difficult to retrieve. These barriers could disenfranchise thousands of eligible voters across our state.

Even more troubling, the bill appears to drastically limit where voter registration can occur—potentially restricting it to just the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the Board of Elections. This would gut the impact of community-led registration drives, especially those that serve young people, first-time voters, and underserved populations.

And if voters are unable to meet these new requirements? They'll be forced to cast a provisional ballot—ballots that are significantly more likely to be rejected for procedural reasons.

Supporters of SB 153 have cited concerns about non-citizen voting. But the facts do not support this fear. There is no evidence of widespread voter fraud or non-citizen voting in Ohio. This bill is a solution in search of a crisis—and in solving a problem that does not exist, it creates real harm.

In addition to the damage it would cause to voters, SB 153 would overwhelm our BMVs and Boards of Elections, forcing them to take on a complex role of verifying legal documents related to immigration and citizenship.

Although the BMV currently reviews documents like birth certificates and naturalization paperwork when issuing IDs, it does not retain copies of these records. This creates a risk of incomplete or inaccurate information, especially for individuals who naturalized many years ago and whose records may not have been properly digitized. Errors in these records could wrongly call a person's citizenship into question and lead to disenfranchisement.

It could also open the state to lawsuits and federal challenges for violating the National Voter Registration Act, placing Ohio taxpayers on the hook for defending discriminatory policy.

At its core, this bill does not enhance democracy—it undermines it. When we make it harder for eligible voters to participate, we erode trust in our institutions and send the message that not all voices matter equally.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 153 and instead pursue legislation that protects and expands access to the ballot for all Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,
Jean Henderson