

Senate Bill 153 Interested Party Testimony

Eliminating the Potential for Noncitizens in Ohio Voter Rolls

To the Honorable Members of The Ohio Senate General Government Committee:

As a concerned citizen and interested party, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for Senate Bill 153 on the critical issue of voter registration integrity. Ensuring that only eligible citizens participate in our elections is fundamental to maintaining public trust.

The Issue

SB153 As Introduced lacks up-front verification of United States citizenship ahead of adding an applicant to the voter rolls. While most applicants are eligible citizens, the absence of a standardized verification process before adding applicants to the voter rolls risks undermining confidence in election outcomes. Manual checks or reliance on self-reported information are insufficient in an era where technology enables efficient, secure data integration.

What is the purpose of a “voter” registration database, if not verified eligible “voters” are permitted on the database?

Other reasons to verify citizenship ahead of adding individuals to the voter rolls include the following:

1. **Administrative Burden:** Post-registration verification requires additional resources to investigate, contact voters, and remove ineligible individuals from rolls. This can strain Board of Elections staff, and lead to errors and delays. Pre-registration verification streamlines the process by filtering out ineligible applicants.
2. **Legal and Political Challenges:** Removing someone from voter rolls after registration can trigger accusations of voter suppression, especially if it appears certain groups are disproportionately targeted. Pre-registration verification reduces these risks by addressing eligibility before enrollment.
3. **Voter Confidence:** Allowing non-citizens onto voter rolls results in inaccurate voter rolls, even temporarily, which can erode public trust in election integrity, and does not align with The National Voter Registration Act requirement for accurate voter rolls.

Proposed Solution

Amend SB153 to require all new voter registrations be placed in a “pending file”, and all existing voter registrations be placed in provisional voting status until citizenship is confirmed through a secure, automated cross-check with authoritative federal databases. Provide an appeals process through a hearing with the Board of Elections to ensure no eligible voter is disenfranchised due to errors.

Verifying citizenship before registering ensures only citizens are registered, as Ohioans voted for when amending Ohio’s Constitution in 2022. Leveraging existing databases minimizes the need for individuals to provide documentary proof of citizenship.

Placing voter registrations in a pending file, and a one-time process placing existing voter registrations in provisional voting status until citizenship is verified through federal databases is a feasible, technology-driven solution to strengthen election integrity in helping to ensure a secure, fair and trusted electoral process. I urge this committee to consider adopting this approach.

Respectfully submitted,

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