



May 26, 2025

Senate General Government Committee
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215-4275

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

VoteRiders is a national non-partisan, non-profit organization with a mission to ensure that all eligible US citizens are able to exercise their freedom to vote.

Founded in 2012, VoteRiders focuses on eliminating ID-related barriers to voting and educating voters on ID requirements to vote.¹ Upon Ohio's passage of a stricter photo ID law in 2023, we have expanded our work in the state, and continue to provide free, direct help to any voter who needs an ID to vote. We have helped tens of thousands of eligible voters get the underlying documents they need to cast a ballot, such as U.S. birth certificates, and/or naturalization documents, and also cover all document and transportation costs associated with getting IDs such as a driver's license or state ID. **We are testifying in opposition to SB 153.**

If Approved, SB 153 Would Disenfranchise Voters in Every Election

VoteRiders' on-the-ground work provides us with an acute understanding of how proof of citizenship laws like SB 153 create powerful barriers to voting. It is a dangerous misconception that everyone has easy access to their proof of citizenship documents. In fact, VoteRiders' continued existence demonstrates that this is not the case.

Simply put, proof of citizenship laws are a solution in search of a problem. The supposed fraud that these laws attempt to "solve for" is rare. Current federal laws already have substantial checks and balances to ensure that only US citizens register and vote. Ohio already requires that voters confirm their US citizenship when they register, under penalty of perjury. The existing penalties for non-US citizens who attempt to vote are steep and severe, including criminal penalties, fines, and deportation. Proof of citizenship laws are not about security at the ballot box—they are about blocking millions of Americans from voting.

Accessing vital documents can be both expensive and time consuming. According to a 2022 study, accessing a certified copy of a birth certificate online ranges from \$31 to \$78 depending on the state.² At an average cost of \$51, that is over five hours of work at state minimum wage.

¹ <https://www.voteriders.org/>

² mapresearch.org/file/MAP-Identity-Documents-report-2022.pdf

For some eligible voters, taking time off work or other responsibilities to stand in a long line at an ID issuing office is simply an inconvenience. For others, it's not an option they can consider, when applying for vital documents or an ID would mean taking a chunk out of a paycheck they depend on to put food on their tables. No one should have to make the choice between getting documents required to exercise their right to vote and meeting basic survival needs.

Accessing these documents is especially difficult for voters who were never issued a US birth certificate—something that disproportionately impacts older voters who were born at home. At VoteRiders we frequently assist voters who discover that the name or other information on their birth certificate is wrong. Voters born out of state may have an especially hard time accessing their birth certificate. Other individuals may have lost or misplaced their birth certificate, or have one that is damaged or illegible.

On top of this, most ID-issuing offices operate only during business hours. Many, especially those in rural areas in Ohio, are not accessible by public transportation, making them difficult to access for those who lack transportation, have mobility challenges, or can not afford to skip work. These challenges would be exacerbated by the fact that SB 153 would mean that Ohioans could no longer register to vote online or through voter registration drives and would instead be required to appear in person at their County Board of Elections or BMV location every time they needed to register or update their registration.

VoteRiders Has Extensive Experience Assisting Voters in Ohio Access Proof of Citizenship Documents and Voter ID

In 2023, VoteRiders expanded our work in Ohio upon the state's passage of a stricter photo ID law. We have conducted nonpartisan voter outreach via text-message, letter-writing, and digital campaigns to alert Ohioans to recent changes to voter ID laws and offer our free services to help them get the photo ID they now need to cast a ballot that counts. These campaigns reached over two million eligible Ohio voters in the last election cycle alone. Currently, our partner organizations and volunteers on the ground across the state help hundreds of Ohioans every single month to access the ID documents they need to work, live, and vote. This often includes helping individuals order or replace the vital proof of citizenship documents such as a birth certificate that would be required under SB 153. As a result, we know firsthand the powerful and unnecessary barriers that such requirements present to eligible voters in terms of cost, time, and bureaucratic hassle.

Amanda, a Cincinnati voter we met late last year, had visited the BMV three times without success when she approached VoteRiders for help with getting a birth certificate and her ID.³ She had a copy of her birth certificate, but the BMV rejected it as “too worn” to use. She also had to get a copy of a prior marriage license in order to explain the difference between her current legal name and the name on her birth certificate. Willie, a Dayton resident, worked with our team for months to get the long-awaited documents he needed to cast a ballot.⁴ Annette in

³ <https://www.voteriders.org/amandas-story/>

⁴ <https://www.voteriders.org/willies-story/>

Cleveland told us that she wanted to “vote to give my opinion,” but without the ID we helped her to get, she never would have been able to have the chance to do so.⁵ To successfully order the birth certificate she needed to get an ID, VoteRiders had to help provide her with an attorney who finally broke through the barriers preventing her from getting the documents she needed.

SB 153 Would Have Dire Effects on Ohio Voter Participation

In 2023, VoteRiders conducted a nationwide study analyzing who lacks ID across the country.⁶ We found that nearly 1 in 10 voting-age US citizens lacks easy access to the proof of citizenship documents that SB 153 would require of all voters to register and stay registered to vote.⁷

A 2024 study found that over 7 million US citizens in Ohio lack a valid US passport.⁸ Further, large numbers of US citizens do not have a current legal name that matches the name on their birth certificate. For example, studies have shown that 79 percent of women have taken their spouse’s last name when they got married and another 5 percent have hyphenated their last name.⁹ Men also experience name changes due to marriage with 5 percent taking their spouse’s last name and another one percent hyphenating their last names.

These statistics make clear that a proof of citizenship law in Ohio—particularly one that also contains an exact name match requirement—would disenfranchise large numbers of eligible voters, particularly married women.

In addition to directly disenfranchising voters at every election, proof of citizenship laws indirectly disenfranchise voters by creating confusion. The confusing nature of ID laws can cause voters who *do* have an accepted form of ID to opt out after mistakenly thinking they can’t comply. And a proof of citizenship requirement can create conditions for voter intimidation at the polls.

Conclusion

If passed, SB 153 would directly harm and disenfranchise tens of thousands of Ohioans who lack the time or financial resources to overcome this new barrier to the ballot box. At the same time, it would confuse, intimidate, and indirectly disenfranchise many more eligible voters.

For the above reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee oppose SB 153.

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⁵ <https://www.voteriders.org/annettes-story/>

⁶ [Voter ID 2023 survey Key Results June 2024 updatev2.docx](https://www.voteriders.org/annettes-story/)

⁷ <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/Who%20Lacks%20Documentary%20Proof%20of%20Citizenship%20March%202025.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/SAVEact-tables.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/07/about-eight-in-ten-women-in-opposite-sex-marriages-say-they-took-their-husbands-last-name/>