

Interested Party Testimony on Senate Bill 153 Poll Workers Should Not Be Tasked With Verifying Citizenship

Chairperson Roegner, Vice Chairperson Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear, and members of the Committee DeMora, Huffman, Reinke, Timkin:

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. My name is Martha Cooper, and I live in Fayette County. I want to begin by commending the members of this committee – and the legislature more broadly – for taking steps to uphold the will of Ohio voters by codifying the requirement that only US citizens may vote in our elections.

In 2022, Ohioans overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment affirming that voting is a right reserved exclusively for US citizens. By placing this mandate into clear statutory language, you are ensuring that our election laws align with the Ohio Constitution and reflect the expressed will of the people.

That is why it is so important that any implementation of this mandate be both meaningful and effective. As written, SB153 does not sufficiently ensure that only US citizens are voting, particularly regarding the role of poll workers (also known as precinct election officials) in verifying proof of citizenship documents.

Precinct election officials are responsible for ensuring that voting is conducted fairly, securely and in accordance with state and federal law. However, requiring them to adequately verify something as critical as a voter's citizenship status through visual inspection alone – without access to official databases – is both unrealistic and ineffective.

A simple sight review of a photocopy cannot confirm citizenship. How can a precinct election official determine whether a document is authentic or a convincing counterfeit?

I observed the November 2024 election at a polling location in Franklin County. It appeared very well run and anyone bringing papers was usually referred to the Voting Location Manager (VLM) for next steps. Often the voter was sent to the provisional table.

I have had poll worker training and have reviewed the Training manual from the Secretary of State that shows pictures of where to look on the back of a driver's license or state ID to determine whether the voter is designated as a non-citizen.

Most check-in workers did look at the back of the ID card, but not everyone.

I voted in the May 2025 primary.

After the poll worker looked at my driver's license, I said that the worker did not check to make sure that I was a US citizen. I was asked how to check and showed them where to look on the back.

These two examples are in no way to raise red flags on the poll workers observed or interacted with.

My point is that there are a lot of activities at check-in.

Let's assist the poll workers process though long lines of waiting voters in an efficient manner and know beforehand who is and is not a US citizen.

They should not be responsible for deciding a voter's citizenship status. Implementing this process would help streamline check-in procedures and help ensure only US citizens vote in Ohio elections.

For these reasons, Senate Bill 153 must be amended to remove the responsibility of verifying citizenship from precinct election officials at the polls.

Again, I appreciate your leadership and your attention to this critical matter. Best wishes.