

Opponent Testimony: SB 153

Laura Rushton

Senate General Government Committee

October 28, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear, & esteemed members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the scope and consequences of the legislation proposed in SB 153. My name is Laura Rushton, and I live in Strongsville in Cuyahoga County. Since I moved back to Cleveland from Mansfield in 2018, I have been involved in two citizen-led ballot initiatives, collecting signatures as an unpaid volunteer. I have also participated in annual voter registration drives, through the League of Women Voters, Mobilize the Vote, and NOVA. I have a strong belief in our electoral system and making sure all citizens can exercise their right to vote. To this end, I have also worked at the polls in several elections.

As someone who has helped low-income seniors as well as young people register to vote, I know there are already many hurdles that make it harder for them to participate. Among these are lack of transportation, unstable housing, physical disabilities, and living away from home while attending college. There is only one ballot drop box available per county, which in Cuyahoga County means having to travel downtown. However, I have witnessed the pride and satisfaction these people take in casting their vote, and I know how important it is for them to have a voice.

SB 153 imposes significant burdens on everyone involved in this system. The requirement to show proof of citizenship is not only unnecessary, but also incredibly daunting for people who can't afford the fees to get a passport, or an original birth certificate. Taking away the very secure option of a ballot drop box harms people who work irregular hours. Home caregivers have difficulty voting in person and need to be able to vote absentee.

Beyond the hurdles this legislation creates for voters, requiring many more of them to vote provisionally, it also imposes significant challenges for county Boards of Elections whose budgets are already strained. A minor discrepancy in the signature on a license compared to the one on the voter registration should not be allowed to invalidate a vote. These kinds of nitpicky requirements seem designed to make the system less efficient by forcing officials to waste their time, and the voter's, requiring an exact match.

Finally, as someone who has worked hard on petition drives, I strongly oppose any measure that infringes on the long-held right of Ohio citizens to lead ballot initiatives or referendums. This includes demanding that petition circulator wear badges declaring they are paid if they receive any compensation, even if it is not monetary. Nor should they be intimidated by having to sign a statement that implies they could face legal penalties, without clearly stating what the violation would be.

In conclusion, I ask that the committee take into account how burdensome this legislation would be to an electoral system that Secretary LaRose and former Secretary Husted have called one of the most secure in the country. There has been virtually no evidence of fraud that would warrant these changes, certainly not enough to justify preventing more citizens from voting. Please vote no on SB 153.