

Good afternoon,

My name is Carlos Buford, and I've been a voter advocate in Ohio for thirteen years — standing with the very people this legislature seems intent on shutting out of the democratic process.

I've worked with college students, senior citizens, and first-time voters who simply want to participate in our democracy. I'm here because the so-called "SAVE Act" will not save democracy — it will silence it.

Across Ohio, young people — especially out-of-state college students — want to vote where they live and contribute, but face an impossible choice.

If they keep their home-state ID, it's not valid for voting here. If they apply for an Ohio ID, they risk breaking the law by holding two state-issued IDs at once. That's not fraud — that's a broken system punishing participation.

Local Boards of Elections would often tell me an ID's purpose is only to verify identity. Yet some lawmakers twist this into a false story of "voter fraud," despite no evidence of a widespread problem.

Since the gutting of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, every new "election integrity" law has felt like targeted voter suppression — deliberate, systemic, and unnecessary.

Senior citizens face their own challenges. Many struggle with fine print, legal language, or confusing ballots. I've helped them line by line — and they are always grateful because someone took the time to make democracy accessible to them.

The SAVE Act does the opposite. It turns ordinary citizens — petition circulators, voter advocates — into potential suspects. It allows the state to investigate, question, and force them to testify, essentially punishing people for helping others participate. My students and seniors would be frightened into silence — and that seems exactly the point.

What we are witnessing is Jim Crow by paperwork — a modern strategy to exhaust, intimidate, and exclude. Democracy survives not by punishing participation but by removing barriers. Yet Republicans blocked a bill that would automatically register 18-year-olds to vote, proving participation isn't being encouraged — it's being penalized.

At the end of the day, democracy shouldn't be something that's controlled — it's something to trust. And if you don't trust the people to vote freely, then, it's not the people who have failed democracy — it's the lawmakers themselves.

Thank you.