

Chairman and members of the General Government Committee,

My name is Nick Denton. I speak today not only as an education researcher committed to civic engagement and democratic access (though my opinions are my own), but also as a son and nephew to elderly Ohioans who would be directly harmed by Senate Bill 153.

SB 153 is a sweeping overhaul of our election laws that, while framed as a security measure, is in fact a solution in search of a problem. Ohio already boasts a 99.9% election audit accuracy rate. In 2024, only five provisional ballots were rejected for lack of citizenship proof—out of nearly 6 million votes cast. That's 0.00008%. The data simply does not support the premise of widespread non-citizen voting.

Yet this bill would disenfranchise tens of thousands of eligible voters—especially married women, students, rural residents, and the elderly—by requiring documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) that many do not possess or cannot easily obtain. My own relatives, who rely on mobility aids and live miles from the nearest BMV, would be forced to vote provisionally and then travel again to cure their ballots. In a time when Ohio's farmers are particularly struggling under the current administration's tariffs to keep the family farm, paying \$165 per voting family member for passports is not financially feasible. That's not security—it's exclusion.

Proponents argue that SB 153 closes loopholes in our registration system. But the bill's reliance on BMV records is flawed. It excludes nearly 900,000 voters registered with Social Security numbers and creates a two-tiered system that treats voters unequally. Worse, it tasks undertrained poll workers with authenticating legal documents—an unrealistic and error-prone process that will lead to long lines, confusion, and disenfranchisement.

Let me be clear: we all want secure elections. But security must not come at the cost of access. There are better, evidence-based solutions to address the concerns raised by proponents:

1. Invest in database modernization and inter-agency coordination—give Boards of Elections secure access to SSA and DHS SAVE databases to verify citizenship without burdening voters.
2. Fund training and technology for election officials—not unfunded mandates that overwhelm local offices.
3. Implement targeted audits and data validation—rather than daily purges that violate federal law and risk removing eligible voters.
4. Preserve community-based registration and drop boxes—which expand access without compromising integrity.

SB 153 is not just unnecessary—it's dangerous. It risks turning our gold-standard system into a bureaucratic maze that punishes the most vulnerable. I urge you to reject this bill and pursue reforms that protect both security and the sacred right to vote.

Thank you,

Nicholas Denton, PhD