



Milena Wood, Policy Fellow
Senate General Government Committee
Testimony in Opposition to SB 153
October 28, 2025

Thank you to the Senate General Government Committee for accepting this testimony. I write today representing not only Abortion Forward but our partners and supporters across the state in opposition to Senate Bill 153, a bill that could block thousands of Ohioans from voting.

Representative democracy functions by putting the voices and wishes of the people at the forefront, giving elected officials and the government power through their consent. Voting is an essential political right and a necessary component of a representative democracy. If people aren't able to vote, we have no democracy.

Efforts to safeguard our American democracy should include a staunch commitment to supporting our communities in exercising their right to vote, regardless of circumstance. In the absence of governmental support, we've seen our own communities step up to try and fill that role, organizing voter registration drives or knocking on doors to get people registered and meet them where they're at. Research has found that "conflicting work schedules, being far away from a polling place, and limited poll opening hours"¹ are all commonly cited reasons for not voting in regular elections.

In recent years the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation that tightened the laws around voter identification, limited access to ballot drop boxes, and limited the hours of in-person absentee voting. But even with such restrictions, online registration, mail-in ballots, and ballot drop boxes continue to be essential for participation in our democracy for those who are unable to vote or register in person.

S.B. 153 over-problematizes an the almost non-existent issue of non-citizens voting at the expense of everyday people. In August 2024, 597 non-citizens were found to have registered to vote in Ohio.² "138 were found to have cast ballots and 459 registered but did not vote."³ Around 8 million people are registered to vote in Ohio, meaning these 597 individuals barely even make up 0.00007% of our registered population let alone be a population large enough to sway the results of any election.

Even on a national scale, instances of non-citizens voting are extremely rare.⁴ To uproot our entire registration process in response to an almost non-existent problem is an absurd over-

¹ <https://today.usc.edu/barriers-to-voting-matter-but-americans-overlook-their-impact-study-finds/>

² <https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2024-08-27/almost-600-of-8m-people-on-ohios-voting-rolls-found-to-be-non-citizens>

³ <https://apnews.com/article/ohio-voters-citizenship-referrals-42799a379bdda8bca7201d6c42f99c65>

⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/noncitizens-voting-republicans-election-2024-immigration-09b86e6768f755fd875f3c51b0e8ea70>

reaction. It is clear this was never about non-citizens voting, it's merely being used as justification to push an agenda of voter-suppression.

The language and rhetoric employed by S.B. 153 shows a blatant disregard for minority, marginalized, and vulnerable groups. If someone born in the United States doesn't have a passport or a birth certificate that matches their current legal name, this act leaves no other avenue to prove their voting eligibility. This could impact the estimated 7 million Ohioans who don't have a passport⁵ or the 83% of women nationally who change their name after marriage.⁶ Any changes to voter registration or the simple act of voting would have to be done in-person at a BMV or Board of Elections, which has already been shown to be a great barrier for many.

Women, the physically disabled, low-income individuals, and members of rural communities will all have an even harder time registering and voting because their representatives made a conscious decision to place barriers in front of everyday people to keep them from exercising their political rights. Even for people who have the required documentation and ability to physically come in and register to vote, the penalties in the bill would discourage them from doing so out of fear of a consequence that does not need to exist.

This bill silences the people's voice in elections through ballot initiatives. In a state with districts so heavily rigged through gerrymandering, ballot initiatives become the only vehicle that citizens have to undo harmful legislation. But our government remains consumed with the prospect of censorship, continuing its attempts at rigging the system further.

When it became obvious in 2023 that the Ohio Reproductive Freedom Amendment was going to qualify for the ballot and had a high likelihood of passage, we watched our representation rush to pass their own constitutional amendment aimed at overpowering the rule of the people. Twice, the people spoke loud and clear: first defeating the legislature's attempt to force a 60% approval rate for passage of constitutional amendments and second passing the Ohio Reproductive Freedom Amendment—both times by overwhelming majorities.

These safeguards exist for a reason, giving weight to the political will of the people when their representation fails to hear their concerns. But with S.B. 153, it's made obvious the General Assembly has failed to fully comprehend the message conveyed by Ohioans: we want our voices truly heard. The people's ability to utilize ballot initiatives exists as a democratic safeguard against unresponsive representatives, yet this body appears determined to undermine this critical civic counterbalance.

If there's anything to be concerned about regarding elections, it should be how we can get *more* people to vote every election cycle. When our ability to vote is impeded by unnecessary and discriminatory requirements, our democracy cannot call itself legitimate. Exercising our right to vote is one of the most fundamental political rights we have, but S.B. 153's superfluous bureaucratic hurdles aim to silence vulnerable portions of our population.

Ohioans deserve more substantive representation from their elected officials. The fundamental obligation of public service requires you amplify and prioritize the voices of those you represent rather than demonstrate such indifference toward their perspectives. This

⁵ <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/SAVEact-tables.pdf>

⁶ <https://my.lww.org/ohio/oxford/action-alert/stop-save-act>

responsibility constitutes the essential bond between the electorate and their representatives:
democracy belongs to the people, even when election outcomes don't turn out in our favor.