



October 27, 2025

Senate General Government Committee
Ohio Statehouse
Columbus, Ohio 43215-4275

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and members of the Senate General Government Committee:

VoteRiders is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization focused on eliminating ID-related barriers to voting, educating voters about ID requirements, and providing free, direct help to any eligible voter who needs an ID to vote.¹ We help voters get the underlying documents that they need to apply for an ID, such as US birth certificates. We also cover all costs associated with getting identification documents, like fees to obtain them or transportation costs. Based on our experience providing ID assistance in Ohio and across the country since 2012, **we are submitting this testimony in opposition to SB 153.**

After Ohio passed a strict photo ID law in 2023, VoteRiders expanded our work in the state. To date, we have helped tens of thousands of eligible Ohio voters get the underlying documents like birth certificates, that they need to apply for a qualifying ID, such as a driver's license or state ID. We also cover the costs of all documents and transportation associated with getting the ID.

If Approved, SB 153 Would Disenfranchise Voters in Every Election

VoteRiders' on-the-ground work provides us with an acute understanding of how documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) laws like SB 153 create powerful barriers to voting. It is a dangerous misconception that everyone has easy access to their proof of citizenship documents. In fact, the growing demand for our services over the last 13 years since our founding demonstrates that this is not the case.

Simply put, proof of citizenship laws are a solution in search of a problem. The supposed fraud that these laws attempt to "solve for" is rare. Current federal laws already have substantial checks and balances to ensure that only US citizens register and vote. Ohio already requires that voters confirm their US citizenship when they register, under penalty of perjury. The existing penalties for non-US citizens who attempt to vote are steep and severe, including criminal penalties, fines, and deportation. Proof of citizenship laws are not about security at the ballot box—they are about blocking millions of Americans from voting.

¹ <https://www.voteriders.org/>



Accessing vital documents can be both expensive and time-consuming. In Ohio, it can cost anywhere between \$22 to \$35 dollars to obtain a birth certificate. That is around two to three hours of work at the state minimum wage.² For some eligible voters, taking time off work or other responsibilities like caregiving to stand in a long line at an ID-issuing office is simply an inconvenience. For others, it's not an option they can even consider, when applying for vital documents or an ID would mean taking a chunk out of a paycheck they depend on to put food on their table. No one should have to choose between getting documents required to exercise their right to vote and meeting basic survival needs.

Accessing proof of citizenship documentation is especially difficult for voters who were never issued a US birth certificate—an experience that disproportionately impacts older voters who were born at home. At VoteRiders, we frequently assist voters who discover that the name or other information on their birth certificate is wrong. Ohio voters born out of state may have an especially hard time accessing their birth certificate. Other individuals may have lost or misplaced their birth certificate, or have one that is damaged or illegible.

On top of this, most ID-issuing offices operate only during business hours. Many offices, especially those in rural areas in Ohio, are not accessible by public transportation, making them difficult to access for those who lack transportation, have mobility challenges, or can not afford transportation. These challenges would be exacerbated by the fact that the passage of SB 153 would mean that Ohioans could no longer register to vote online or through voter registration drives and would instead be required to appear in person at their County Board of Elections or BMV location every time they needed to register or update their registration.

VoteRiders Has Extensive Experience Assisting Voters in Ohio To Access Proof of Citizenship Documents and Voter ID

VoteRiders expanded our work in Ohio upon the state's passage of a strict photo ID law in 2023. We have continually conducted nonpartisan voter outreach via peer-to-peer text messages, letter-writing, and online digital campaigns to alert Ohioans to the recent change to the voter ID law. In this outreach, we offer our free services to help Ohioans get the photo ID they now need to cast a ballot that counts. Combined, these efforts allowed us to reach over two million eligible Ohio voters in the last election cycle alone. Currently, our partner organizations and volunteers on the ground across the state help hundreds of Ohioans every single month to access the ID documents they need to work, live, and vote. This often includes helping individuals order or replace vital proof of citizenship documents, such as a birth certificate that would be required under SB 153. As a result, we know firsthand the powerful and unnecessary barriers that such requirements impose on eligible voters in terms of cost, time, and bureaucratic hassle.

² <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/vital-statistics/how-to-order-certificates>; [https://www.columbus.gov/Services/Public-Health/Get-a-Birth-or-Death-Certificate#:~:text=Cost:.Only%20certified%20copies%20are%20available.](https://www.columbus.gov/Services/Public-Health/Get-a-Birth-or-Death-Certificate#:~:text=Cost:.Only%20certified%20copies%20are%20available.;); <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/minimum-wage/state>



For example, Amanda, a Cincinnati voter we met in late 2024, had visited the BMV three times without success when she approached VoteRiders for help with getting a birth certificate and her ID.³ She had a copy of her birth certificate, but the BMV rejected it as “too worn” to use. She also had to get a copy of a prior marriage license in order to explain the difference between her current legal name and the name on her birth certificate. Willie, a Dayton resident, worked with our team for months to get the long-awaited documents he needed to cast a ballot.⁴ Annette in Cleveland told us that she wanted to “vote to give my opinion,” but without the ID we helped her to get, she never would have been able to have the chance to do so.⁵ To successfully order her birth certificate she first needed to get an ID. To do so, VoteRiders had to help provide her with an attorney who finally broke through the barriers preventing her from getting the documents she needed.

SB 153 Would Have Dire Effects on Ohio Voter Participation

In 2023, VoteRiders and partners conducted a nationwide study analyzing who lacks ID across the country.⁶ We found that over 21.3 million eligible voters (9%, or about 1 in 10 adult US citizens) across the country do not have any DPOC, or do not have easy access to their DPOC.⁷

A 2024 study found that over 7 million US citizens in Ohio lack a valid US passport.⁸ Further, for large numbers of US citizens their current legal name does not match the name on their birth certificate. For example, studies have shown that 79 percent of women have taken their spouse’s last name when they got married and another 5 percent have hyphenated their last name.⁹ Men also experience name changes due to marriage, with 5 percent taking their spouse’s last name and another one percent hyphenating their last names. These voters would struggle to provide proof of citizenship documentation.

These statistics make clear that a proof of citizenship law in Ohio—particularly one that also contains an exact name match requirement—would disenfranchise large numbers of eligible voters, particularly married women.

In addition to directly disenfranchising voters at every election, a proof of citizenship law would also indirectly disenfranchise Ohio voters by creating confusion. The confusing nature of these

³ <https://www.voteriders.org/amandas-story/>

⁴ <https://www.voteriders.org/willies-story/>

⁵ <https://www.voteriders.org/annettes-story/>

⁶ [Voter ID 2023 survey Key Results June 2024 updatev2.docx](https://www.voteriders.org/Voter_ID_2023_survey_Key_Results_June_2024_updatev2.docx)

⁷ <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/Who%20Lacks%20Documentary%20Proof%20of%20Citizenship%20March%202025.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/SAVEact-tables.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/07/about-eight-in-ten-women-in-opposite-sex-marriages-say-they-took-their-husbands-last-name/>



laws can cause voters who *do* have an accepted form of ID to opt out after mistakenly thinking they can't comply.

Conclusion

If passed, SB 153 would directly harm and disenfranchise tens of thousands of Ohioans who lack the time or financial resources to overcome this new barrier to the ballot box. At the same time, it would confuse, intimidate, and indirectly disenfranchise many more eligible voters.

For the above reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee oppose SB 153.

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