

SB 296 Opponent Testimony
Provided on May 23, 2016 by
Carolyn Perkins, NAACP - Dayton Youth Conference

Chairman Brown, Members of the House Government Oversight and Accountability Committee:

I am writing in opposition to SB 296 on behalf of the Dayton NAACP Youth Conference. The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination. Our organization has a long history of fighting against poll taxes and other sinister barriers to the ballot box.

While the intent of this legislation may not be discriminatory, the effect of SB 296 certainly is discriminatory. The most appalling aspect of this bill requires a petitioner seeking to extend voting hours to front tens of thousands of dollars to cover overtime pay for every poll worker in the county. This creates insurmountable barriers for ordinary citizens. While the substitute version of this bill allows a judge to waive the bond requirement, allowing judges to cherry-pick which plaintiffs have to pay the exorbitant bond does nothing to make the provision less discriminatory or illegal. We will continue to fight to ensure that the right to vote doesn't carry a price tag.

By law, every Ohio voter is offered 13 hours to vote on Election Day. Suppose for example, that Polling Place A was open for 13 hours, but Polling Place B opened late and was only open 11 hours. Voters at Polling Place A would have an unfair advantage. By analogy, if Polling Place B experienced widespread voting machine failures such that voters were not permitted to vote for two hours, voters at Polling Place A would have an unfair advantage. Extending voting hours at Polling Place B would be the only way to ensure that voters have the same voting opportunity. It's not a sufficient solution to simply expect voters to be in line by 7:30.

Taxpayers fund the cost of elections. While we can't expect every election to be perfect, this does not absolve election officials from the responsibility of adequately training poll workers and having thoughtful contingency planning in place. When voters are not permitted to vote, due to no fault of their own, the scales of justice shouldn't be tilted against them. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to this bill.