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*of Cleveland*  
*Since 1905*

**Ohio House  
Government Oversight Committee  
Written Testimony of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland  
December 7, 2022**

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Good morning Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 294, the Enact Ohio Election Security and Modernization Act. My name is Corrylee Drozda, and I am an attorney with The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland is a non-profit law firm that provides free civil legal services to clients with low incomes in the northeast Ohio counties of Cuyahoga, Lorain, Ashtabula, Lake and Geauga. Our mission is to secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who are low-income and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions. I am an attorney in the Health and Opportunity Practice Group which includes our immigration, education, and public benefits practices. Our immigration work focuses on the representation of immigrant victims and survivors of crime and domestic violence.

**Requirements for Ohio photo identification cards and driver's licenses are sufficiently secure. Noncitizens in lawful immigration status already face significant barriers to meeting those requirements.**

In the areas of immigration, education, and public benefits law, we help remove barriers to safety, security, and justice for our clients. Through working with our clients, we know that photo identification is vital to an individual's dignity, independence, safety, and security. It is needed to secure employment and housing; apply for social services; access education and healthcare; and engage with government entities, such as our judicial system, law enforcement agencies, and local government offices. Yet, many Ohioans, including families living in poverty, noncitizens in lawful immigration status, senior citizens, and survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, face substantial barriers to meeting the requirements<sup>1</sup> for an Ohio driver's license or photo identification card [hereinafter "Ohio ID"].

The Ohio ID requirements are ample and sufficiently secure. The stories of two Legal Aid clients illustrate that noncitizens in lawful immigration status cannot easily access state IDs without the proper documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> To obtain a state ID in Ohio, an applicant must provide proof of their (1) full legal name, (2) date of birth, (3) U.S. citizenship or lawful immigration status, (4) Social Security number, and (5) Ohio address. See Ohio BMV, Driver's License & ID Cards, Acceptable Documents (last visited Nov. 21, 2022), <https://www.bmv.ohio.gov/dl-identity-documents.aspx#collapseCompliant>.

Alexandra is a young woman from Ukraine. During her senior year of high school, a change in federal immigration policy caused a lapse in her lawful immigration status. Unable to pursue college or secure employment after her high school graduation, Alexandra had no proof of her Ohio residence. She recently regained lawful immigration status and became eligible for work authorization, but the Ohio BMV denied her request for an Ohio ID because she cannot produce proof of residence.

Sasha has held lawful immigration status for more than a decade. She is married to a United States citizen and has worked in the trucking industry for many years. Every year, Sasha must renew her work authorization with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Her commercial driver's license is valid only while she has work authorization. Due to increasingly long processing delays with USCIS, Sasha's work authorization often expires before she receives her new card, which means that her commercial driver's license also expires, and she cannot work.

The experiences of Alexandra and Sasha illustrate that the Ohio ID requirements already provide sufficient safeguards to ensure that only those who are eligible for IDs can get them. These requirements are so effective that even our clients who meet all the requirements still have difficulty getting an Ohio ID.

**Adding citizenship status on Ohio photo identification cards and driver's licenses will disincentivize noncitizens in lawful immigration status from getting state IDs, which will hamper law enforcement and make communities less secure.**

Our noncitizen clients, including those who are in lawful immigration status, often share with us their fears that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will deport them. Due to language barriers, cultural differences, unfamiliarity with the U.S. legal system, and fear of immigration enforcement, noncitizens are already hesitant to share their information with government offices and report criminal activity in their communities to law enforcement. Adding a citizenship designation on Ohio IDs will only exacerbate these problems. Noncitizens in lawful immigration status may decline to renew or get an Ohio ID altogether, which will lead to more unlicensed drivers on the roads and less Ohioans with photo identification. Less Ohioans with valid photo identification will hamper the important work of law enforcement agencies and make our communities less safe. Security in our elections and communities depends on trustworthy photo identification that is accessible to all Ohioans who are eligible. H.B. 294 will accomplish just the opposite.

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland opposes H.B. 294. Access to photo identification is vital to an individual's dignity, independence, and safety, and essential to the security of our communities. We urge the Ohio House of Representatives to preserve, not undermine, access to Ohio IDs. Thank you for reviewing our testimony.