



HJR 4 – Prohibit Local Governments from Allowing Non-Electors to Vote, Proponent Testimony

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for House Joint Resolution 4.

In February of 2020, I presided over a naturalization ceremony in this very building. We swore in 219 new Americans from 54 different countries. These people stood their place in line, they filled out the abundance of paperwork, they worked hard and passed the language proficiency and civics tests (a test many who were granted their citizenship by birth may struggle to pass)... and then they waited. They waited to become a citizen of a nation that has been a beacon of freedom and democracy since our founding.

As the ceremony wrapped up, my team and I got to work passing out voter registration forms and getting these new citizens ready to vote in their new home. They had earned it.

Unfortunately, in 15 municipalities across the nation, the value of citizenship has been diminished by laws that allow non-citizens to vote. These individuals, who maintain allegiance to another nation, make decisions each election day that impact the daily life of Americans in places like San Francisco and New York City.

The same attempt was made in 2020 right here in Ohio. The Village of Yellow Springs passed an ordinance that allowed non-citizens to vote.

I stopped it.

Unfortunately, I'm not always going to be the Secretary of State. Thanks to some more liberal interpretations of home rule, there is an argument that a municipality in Ohio could allow non-citizens to vote.

The attorneys of your Legislative Service Commission stated it very plainly: *"a chartered municipal corporation likely can allow for noncitizens to vote in local elections through its powers to regulate matters of local self-government under its home rule authority."*

If someone more comfortable with non-citizens voting sat in my chair, how long would it be before Yellow Springs was joined by Columbus, Cleveland, or Cincinnati?

While it is of paramount importance that voting is protected as a right exclusively for American citizens, there would be additional and significant administrative challenges for Ohio's Boards of Elections if localities were permitted to open elections to non-citizens. Because non-citizens could not vote in any statewide or federal elections, an entirely new voter registration system, as well as a completely different set of ballots would need to be created, maintained, and secured. This would effectively necessitate a parallel, duplicative system of election administration just for non-citizens. In turn, this would create additional costs and difficulties in terms of the reporting of election results.

Additionally, what if there is a mistake? What if a non-citizen who is seeking to become an American is given the wrong ballot, and in turn, breaks the law by voting in a state or federal election? Their dream of citizenship would be over.

To me, this is a smart, easy, and obvious change to our Ohio Constitution, and Senator Blessing, Representative Seitz, and Representative Edwards should be commended for taking on the issue. It's only right to allow Ohio voters the opportunity to vote on this amendment and ensure that the integrity of their vote is secured long into the future.

After all, a vote is a sacred right that many have fought and bled to protect – but only a right that is earned by birth or the oath of citizenship. American elections are only for American citizens - and that should never change.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State