

Battle Over Voting Rights Heated in Election Year

There is unprecedented interest in either restraining or loosening laws that affect state voting rights, especially in this 2024 presidential election year.

The League of Women Voters, as part of a coalition of voting rights organizations, is supporting the *Citizens Not Politicians* amendment to the state constitution. This amendment would create a committee of nonpoliticians to draw congressional and state district maps. This amendment will finally allow Ohioans to choose their politicians rather than politicians manipulating map variables to carve out their voters and squash competitive races.

There are also eight active bills in the Ohio legislature that would affect voting rights. Two of those bills would expand access; the remaining are designed to reign in voting access.

Here is a run-down:

S 184 ...prohibit local boards of elections from receiving mail ballots in outdoor receptacles.

S 147 ...change the party affiliation process, create closed primary elections, and expand the availability of the general registration process in certain state courts.

H 210 ...create a process by which a voter may affiliate with a political party during initial voter registration or when updating one's registration. The bill would then require that a voter be affiliated with a political party in order to participate in that party's primary election. A voter would not be permitted to change their affiliation in the same calendar year as a primary election and still vote in their new party's primary.

H 208 ...create a process by which a voter may affiliate with a political party during initial voter registration or when updating one's registration. The bill would then require that a voter be affiliated with a political party in order to participate in that party's primary election.

S 71 ...create the office of data analytics and archives in the office of the Secretary of State. Existing law provides for the maintenance of a statewide voter registration database, but does not designate a specific office for its administration. Specifically, the bill would:

- Create the office of data analytics and archives in the office of the Secretary of State, and give the office primary responsibility to administer the statewide voter registration database.
- Standardize the information required to be in the statewide voter registration database for all voters by requiring the following information about each voter:
 - name,
 - birth date,
 - current residence address,
 - precinct number,
 - Ohio driver's license or state identification card number, if available,
 - last four digits of the voter's social security number, if available,
 - telephone number, if available,
 - electronic mail address, if available,
 - voter registration date,

-voting history (which the bill specifically indicates only includes elections in which the voter cast a ballot that was counted),
-last activity date, and
-any other information the Secretary of State requires by rule to be included.

- Declare all information in voter registration forms and in the statewide voter registration database to be public record and publish the information on the website of the Secretary of State.
- Under existing law, voter registration records are available for inspection in person only, in the presence of an employee of the board of elections. The bill would exempt from public disclosure the following information:
 - o A voter's full or partial social security number,
 - o driver's license or state identification card number,
 - o telephone number, or electronic mail address,
 - o anything held confidential under existing law,
 - o the address of a designated public service worker who has requested it be redacted, and
 - o any other information prohibited from being disclosed by state or federal law.
- Require a board of elections to send a daily record of its voter registration database to the secretary of state beginning on the 46th day before an election and continuing until the 81st day after the election.
- Extend the period a board of elections must retain all copies of ballots from 60 days after the election to 81 days.

SJR 3 ...propose a constitutional amendment under which a person may register to vote as late as Election Day to cast a ballot in an election. Under existing law, the person must be registered for thirty days prior to the election. If passed, the resolution would require approval by the voters before taking effect.

H 40 ...permit a voter to request to receive an application for a mail ballot for each election by requesting to be put on the "permanent absentee voter list." Requests could be made directly, or when initiating or updating registration, or applying for a mail ballot. A voter added to the list would be mailed an application for a mail ballot for each election until the voter requested to be removed from the list or the voter's registration is canceled.

S 51 ...create the Election Integrity Division within the office of the Secretary of State. The division would have the following responsibilities:

- Investigate allegations of election fraud and voter suppression on its own initiative or upon receiving a complaint. The division would have the power to administer oaths, issue subpoenas, summon witnesses, compel the production of evidence, and hold hearings.
- Allow the public to submit allegations of election fraud and voter suppression.
- Refer allegations, as appropriate, to a prosecutor, a law enforcement agency, or another state or federal agency for further investigation or prosecution.

- Submit a report to the governor and the legislature each January summarizing and providing statistics regarding the allegations and investigations with respect to the previous calendar year.

Complete updated information for these bills can be found on the Voting Rights Lab website here <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/pending/search>

Stay vigilant, stay informed!

~Mary Robertson