



**Testimony of Bianca Avery – Texas HB 1026 – House Elections Committee, Apr. 8, 2021**

I write as the Texas State Coordinator for Fair Elections Center’s Campus Vote Project. Fair Elections Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation. The Center’s Campus Vote Project educates and engages young voters on voting rights issues, working to institutionalize civic engagement and voting at university and college campuses, including in Texas. I write in opposition to HB 1026.

Texas law already erects many barriers to registration and voting. Even with record voter turnout in November 2020, Texas ranked 45th nationally in voter participation, well behind the national turnout rate. HB 1026 would only widen the gap.

Among other rules, by requiring documentary proof of citizenship, the bill would disenfranchise tens of thousands of eligible Texans, as similar policies have been shown to do in Kansas and Arizona. Courts reviewing the Kansas law found no evidence to justify its burden on voters and held it unconstitutional. Through the documentary proof requirement, elimination of volunteer deputy registrars (VDRs)—Texas citizens who currently help voters access registration through community-based voter registration drives—and elimination of the county registrars’ role, the bill seeks to effectively end voter registration activities in communities. Such drives reach potential voters at churches, schools, and other public places where even those who have them are unlikely to carry birth certificates or passports.

As a result, HB 1026 would impact young people and others who particularly benefit from outreach and organizing by community drives. New voters like students must already overcome informational barriers to voting and registration. Community drives conducted by VDRs often help these voters with such challenges, including on campus, as do registration events held in cooperation with registrars’ offices, which this bill would also eliminate. These types of events also serve as a starting point for further civic engagement.

Additionally, this bill would exclude eligible Texans without documentary proof of citizenship even from registering on their own, such as students living away from their families, seniors, and married people who adopt a spouse’s surname. Not all voters have citizenship documentation, and those who do not disproportionately include poor, rural and non-Anglo citizens. Most Americans do not have a passport. Others may possess as documentation of their citizenship only their certificate of naturalization; however, if this document is lost, a replacement copy costs \$555, and the wait time for processing can be many months, longer than the bill gives individuals to respond before the person’s registration application would be rejected.

For these reasons, the Committee should reject HB 1026. Thank you for your consideration, and please feel welcome to contact me at the email address provided.