

# The Austin Report

May 20, 2025

E-Newsletter

## SB 16: Securing Elections or Silencing Voters?

by Senator Royce West

Is SB 16 truly protecting our elections, or is it creating new barriers to the ballot box? The answer depends on who you ask, and who stands to be left out.

This legislative session has brought forward many pressing issues, from education to natural resources. But today, I want to highlight a matter that I believe deserves far more attention: the growing concerns surrounding SB 16 and its potential impact on voting rights.

### What exactly does SB 16 do?

Senate Bill 16 introduces measures that critics argue could suppress the voices of everyday Texans. But what exactly does this bill do?

Under SB 16, individuals would be required to present specific documentation to prove their U.S. citizenship in order to register to vote. Acceptable documents include a U.S. passport, a certified birth certificate, naturalization papers, an ID issued by U.S.



Citizenship and Immigration Services, or a certificate of birth abroad issued by the U.S. Department of State. Additionally, if an applicant's citizenship cannot be verified using their drivers license or identification card number, they must submit one of the approved documents directly to the voter registrar. If they fail to do so, they will be restricted to casting a limited federal ballot, which includes only races for U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives.

When a voter receives a limited federal ballot, the presiding judge is required to inform them that their citizenship could not be verified and, as a result, they are only eligible to vote in U.S. Senate and House races. The voter then has six days to provide proof of citizenship in order for their limited ballot to be counted as a full ballot. This process not only limits participation in state and local,



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elections, it also excludes these voters from casting a ballot in presidential elections, further narrowing their voices in the democratic process.



## Why this matters.

Requiring individuals to present proof of citizenship may do more harm than good, introducing errors and unnecessary barriers into the voting process.

During the House Elections Committee hearing on HB 5337, SB 16's identical companion, several concerns were raised, most notably, that the current system already verifies citizenship status, as non-citizen voting is illegal under both state and federal law. Rather than strengthening election integrity, this bill risks suppressing voter turnout by imposing new hurdles for eligible voters and placing additional burdens on local election officials, who would be tasked with verifying citizenship documentation.

Passports and other approved forms of identification can be costly and time consuming to obtain. Many Texans, especially those born at home or in underserved areas, may not have immediate access to a birth certificate or other required documents. SB 16 threatens to deprive the vote to fully qualified citizens simply because they are unable to meet these new requirements.

## Stay in the loop.

Senate Bill 16 has passed out of the Senate and now sits just steps away from final passage, as it currently awaits consideration in the House Calendars Committee.

My office and I remain committed to advocating for the best interests of the constituents of Senate District 23 and all Texans.

As this legislative session continues, I will keep you informed and engaged with regular updates to ensure that you stay connected to the work being done on your behalf at the State Capitol.

See you next week with more updates.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roy Wilkins". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "R" and a long horizontal stroke.

**Texas State Senator**

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