

AAUW Opposes the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act



AAUW ASK: Contact your U.S. Senators asking that they vote against the latest version of the SAVE Act (S.128). Share this briefing with your boards and branches.

WHAT THE SAVE ACT ACTUALLY DOES

The SAVE Act is not a voter ID bill. This legislation goes further than the voter ID laws in every single state except Ohio. **It would make it harder for nearly every citizen in the country to register to vote or update their registration.**

The bill requires anyone registering to vote — or updating an existing registration — to appear in person at an election office and present physical proof of U.S. citizenship: a valid passport, an original birth certificate, or naturalization papers. Only 6% of voters currently register that way. The other 94% rely on online registration, mail-in registration, or community registration drives — all of which this bill would effectively end.

It would also require all state voter rolls to be shared with the Department of Homeland Security, require election officials to use an error-prone federal database to verify citizenship, and impose civil and criminal penalties on election officials who make honest mistakes. Everything would take effect immediately, with no time for voters or officials to adjust — even with 2026 local and primary elections already underway.

On public polling: While some surveys show majority support for this bill, that reflects messaging that conflates it with standard voter ID. When people learn what the bill actually requires (passports, birth certificates, in-person registration, DHS data sharing), support drops sharply. Our efforts can help close that information gap.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

The SAVE Act is being brought to the Senate floor for debate. The bill has not passed — but it is not dead. Outside pressure from President Trump and allies is intense and could keep the debate alive for days or longer, including late-night and extended sessions. There is also active pressure to lower the vote threshold to a simple majority — an effort that has so far failed but remains a live threat. The bill could be amended to add provisions banning mail-in voting and unrelated anti-transgender measures.

Do not assume this is over. Advocates must sustain pressure on persuadable Republican senators while supporting those who oppose the bill. The situation can shift quickly.

Senators who need to hear from constituents:

Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan (AK) · Jerry Moran (KS) · Mitch McConnell (KY) · Susan Collins (ME) · Roger Wicker (MS) · Thom Tillis (NC) · Mike Rounds (SD) · Shelley Moore Capito (WV)

CALLS TO ACTION

- **Call your senators:** Call (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to your senator's office. Constituent calls carry real weight.
- **Use the AAUW Action Alert:** <https://aauw.quorum.us/campaign/158100/> — send a message directly to your senators.
- **Share with your boards and branches:** Please forward this to your state boards of directors, branch leaders, friends, and family.
- **Share on social media:** Follow AAUW and share our posts on branch, state, and personal channels.

TALKING POINTS

Use these points when calling senators or talking to community members.

- **Introduce Yourself and AAUW:** “I’m a member of AAUW — the American Association of University Women — a nonpartisan organization with members across your state. AAUW has advocated for voting rights and gender equity for more than 140 years. I’m calling because we strongly oppose the SAVE Act.”
- **Correct the Framing:** “This is not a voter ID bill. It goes further than the voter ID laws in every state except one. It requires every voter who registers or updates their registration to appear in person with a passport or birth certificate. Only 6% of voters currently register that way. This would eliminate the methods 94% of Americans rely on — online registration, mail registration, and voter drives.”
- **Name Who Gets Hurt:** “This bill falls hardest on women. About 69 million women don’t have a birth certificate that matches their current name because of marriage or divorce. Beyond women, it harms seniors on fixed incomes who may have moved and lost track of documents, rural voters who live hours from an election office, military families abroad, tribal voters whose IDs don’t qualify, and young people — student IDs won’t be accepted under this bill.”
- **Address the False Premise:** “Noncitizen voting in federal elections is already illegal. Election officials already verify eligibility using multiple systems. This bill doesn’t close a real gap — it creates new ones. Over 21 million eligible American citizens don’t have easy access to these documents. And the bill takes effect immediately — there is no phase-in, no time for voters to prepare.”
- **Close with the Ask:** “AAUW urges Senator [Name] to vote NO on the SAVE Act, S.128. Real election integrity means ensuring every eligible citizen can vote — not creating barriers that block millions of Americans from that right. Thank you for your time. We hope the Senator will stand with AAUW and oppose this bill.”

The SAVE Act’s Document Requirements: What They Really Mean

The SAVE Act requires proof of U.S. citizenship to register or update voter registration — in person, immediately upon enactment. For most Americans, that means either a **certified birth certificate or a passport**. Let’s look at what would actually be required, what it costs, and who would be affected.

WHAT DOCUMENTS ACTUALLY QUALIFY

The list is shorter than it appears. Acceptable documents include a valid U.S. passport; a REAL ID that “indicates citizenship” (see below); a military ID plus a service record showing U.S. birthplace; a government-issued photo ID showing U.S. birthplace; or any other photo ID paired with a birth certificate, naturalization certificate, or Consular Report of Birth Abroad. In practice, for most Americans, this comes down to a passport or a certified birth certificate.

REAL ID: A common source of confusion. The bill says a REAL ID “that indicates citizenship” qualifies — but only 5 states issue a driver’s license that actually indicates citizenship: Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, and Washington. These are called Enhanced Driver’s Licenses (EDLs). In the other 45 states, a REAL ID-compliant license does not indicate citizenship and would not qualify under this bill. That’s because REAL IDs can legally be issued to noncitizens with lawful immigration status. The star on your license means your identity was verified — not that you’re a U.S. citizen.

GETTING A CERTIFIED BIRTH CERTIFICATE: PROCESS, COST & TIME

For most people who don’t have a passport, a certified birth certificate is the most realistic path. Here’s what it actually involves:

What you need to apply:

- Your full name at birth, exact date of birth, city and county of birth, and both parents’ full legal names
- A valid photo ID to verify your identity
- Payment — typically \$15–\$30 in state fees; if ordering online through VitalChek (the authorized vendor for all 50 states), expect \$25–\$60+ in combined fees
- A physical mailing address — digital birth certificates are not accepted

The specific challenge for older Americans:

- Many Americans 65+ were born before birth registration was standardized, or were born at home or delivered by midwives — and their births may never have been formally recorded.
- In the Jim Crow South, Black women were often denied hospital access; their births frequently went unregistered.
- When no record exists, a person must file a delayed birth certificate — a separate, more complex process requiring 3 supporting documents from the first 5 years of life (census records, baptism certificates, school records).
- For someone in their 70s or 80s, the relatives who could provide witness affidavits may no longer be living.
- Some states require the application to be notarized and processed through a court order, adding further time and expense.

Processing time:

- Online via VitalChek: 1–2 weeks
- Mail-in request: up to 10 weeks
- In-person (where available): same day to several days
- Non-refundable fee even if no record is found

WHAT IT COULD COST SOMEONE STARTING FROM SCRATCH

A person who lacks both a passport and a birth certificate would need to navigate this chain. Note that obtaining a passport requires a certified birth certificate first.

Item	Typical Cost	Time
Certified birth certificate (state fee + VitalChek)	\$25–\$60+	1–10 weeks
Additional search fees for older/difficult records	\$10–\$30+	Varies
Name change documentation (marriage certificate copy)	\$10–\$30	1–4 weeks
Delayed birth certificate process (if no record exists)	\$50–\$150+	Months; may require court order
Transportation to vital records office (multiple trips)	Variable	—
Potential total (before transportation)	\$95–\$270+	Up to 4–5 months

AAUW Opposes the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act

NO FUNDING. NO PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN. IMMEDIATE EFFECT.

No federal funding: The SAVE Act provides **no funding to states** to implement these changes. States would need to overhaul registration systems, retrain poll workers, purchase new equipment, and manage voter confusion — entirely at their own expense. This is a massive unfunded mandate passed to local communities.

No public awareness: The bill contains **no provision for voter education or outreach**. Millions of Americans — especially older voters who may not closely follow federal legislation — would simply show up to register or update their registration and be turned away. There is no requirement to inform them in advance.

Immediate effect: The bill **takes effect the day it is signed into law**. There is no phase-in period. Election officials must comply immediately, with no time to build systems, train staff, or prepare voters. An implementation window of at least 18–24 months would be necessary to avoid widespread disruption — but the bill grants none.

24th Amendment concerns: Requiring voters to pay fees to obtain documents as a condition of registering to vote raises serious constitutional questions under the 24th Amendment, which prohibits poll taxes. For low-income and older voters on fixed incomes, **\$95–\$270+ to exercise the right to vote is not a minor inconvenience — it is a barrier the Constitution was specifically written to prevent.**

Sources: Bipartisan Policy Center, Center for American Progress, Brennan Center for Justice, National Association of Counties, TSA/DHS REAL ID guidance, U.S. Department of State, Institute for Responsive Government, Campaign Legal Center.

WHO WOULD BE HARMED — AND HOW

This bill would not affect all Americans equally. The burden lands hardest on communities that have already faced the greatest barriers to civic participation.

Women Who Have Changed Their Name –

Approximately 69 million women do not have a birth certificate matching their current legal name due to marriage or divorce. Under this bill, they would need to present additional documents — a marriage license, court order, or both — just to register or update their registration. About 48% of voting-age women with a birth certificate have one that does not reflect their current name. This is not a minor inconvenience; it is a deliberate barrier built into the bill.

People of Color – Strict documentary requirements disproportionately impact voters of color. Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native, and Asian American voters are statistically less likely to hold passports and face greater obstacles replacing documents, compounding barriers these communities have faced for generations.

Research confirms that laws requiring this type of documentation widen the racial turnout gap.

Younger Voters and Students – Only 53% of younger voters ages 18–29 have a valid passport, and 16% of young men can't produce any documented proof of citizenship. Student IDs are not accepted under this bill. The SAVE Act would eliminate the registration methods young people rely on most — online registration, mail-in registration, and campus voter drives. More than 1 in 4 young people move each year, and every move triggers a new in-person documentation requirement. In Arizona, young voters are three times more likely to be disqualified under similar requirements; in Texas, 12% lack sufficient documentary proof.

Military Servicemembers – A military ID alone would not qualify under the SAVE Act. Servicemembers would also need a birth

AAUW Opposes the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act



certificate or a service record showing U.S. birthplace. Military families already update voter registrations more often than most Americans due to changes of station, deployments, and name changes. Each update would require producing that documentation again. A coalition of nonpartisan organizations representing overseas and military voters — including the Secure Families Initiative, led by active-duty military spouses — has formally opposed the bill and warned that it would gut the registration system service members have relied on for decades.

Tribal Voters – Tribal IDs do not include place of birth or an expiration date, meaning they would not meet this bill’s strict documentation requirements. Tribal voters would need to present their tribal ID plus a birth certificate or passport — documents that are often expensive and difficult to replace. Many tribal members live 100+ miles from the nearest election office. Only 66% of Native Americans are currently registered to vote; this bill would further disenfranchise tens

of thousands of eligible voters.

Transgender Voters – Transgender voters face distinct barriers under this bill. If the name or gender marker on their documents does not match how they currently identify — a common situation — they may be rejected at registration. Updating identity documents is expensive, legally complex, and in many states no longer possible under current policies. This bill would effectively use the registration process to out and exclude transgender voters.

Rural Voters – Many rural voters rely on online and mail-in registration precisely because election offices can be hours away. In the largest 30 counties, the average round-trip to an election office is over 4 hours and 260 miles. The in-person requirement this bill mandates would force voters in rural communities to make that journey simply to register — a burden that falls especially hard on those without reliable transportation.

The more unified our opposition appears, the harder it becomes for senators to ignore what is at stake. Share widely. Drive calls and emails to Senate offices from our members. Let every senator know: AAUW and your community oppose this bill.