

TESTIMONY OF JUAN PROAÑO
SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
MAY 14, 2025

Senator Padilla, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding my concerns with the SAVE Act. My name is Juan Proaño, and I am the CEO of the League of United Latin American Citizens, or LULAC.

With more than 325,000 members throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, LULAC is the oldest and largest Latino civil rights membership organization. LULAC members are veterans, teachers, police officers, community leaders, and even elected officials. Our 535 local LULAC councils play key roles in their communities, helping their friends and neighbors find a way to navigate life in a United States that is increasingly hostile to their presence.

I appear today to voice our unequivocal opposition to the so-called Safeguarding American Voter Eligibility Act, or SAVE Act.

This anti-voter bill would make it **significantly harder for millions of Americans – especially Latinos, immigrants, Black Americans, and women – to exercise their right to vote.**

It is a dangerous step backwards for voting rights, that would force every voter to show proof of citizenship, like a passport or birth certificate, every time they register to vote. Most Americans simply do not carry those documents in daily life. In fact, more than **21 million eligible U.S. voters don't have documents that prove their citizenship readily available.**

From working fathers in Texas to “abuelitas” in California, many Latinos and Americans of all backgrounds would struggle to find and **present paperwork that the federal government has never before required.**

The result? **Millions of citizens could be disenfranchised** – kept from making their voices heard – by an unnecessary bureaucratic barrier.

I want to highlight three burdens the SAVE Act would impose. These **new requirements would hit Latino, immigrant, and working-class voters the hardest**, and they would erect obstacles that our grandparents **thought they had overcome decades ago**.

First, the SAVE Act would flip the burden of proof onto every voter to prove their citizenship. It doesn't matter if you've been an American citizen your whole life – you would now have to prove it with paperwork each time you register. This might sound simple, but **for many it is an almost insurmountable challenge**. The **economic burden** of securing documentation falls hardest on people of color, particularly those from poor communities. For an hourly worker who can't easily take time off, the requirement to appear in person with documents is another heavy blow. In short, the documentation rule is a **bureaucratic barrier** that will keep my community and many others from the ballot box.

Perhaps even more alarming is that the SAVE Act would force officials to **retroactively audit and purge voter rolls** of anyone flagged as a “non-citizen.” This raises the very real possibility of **American citizens – especially naturalized immigrants – being kicked off the voter rolls by mistake**. This would create chaos and mistrust, hitting communities like ours – with many naturalized citizens and ethnic-similar names – the hardest. This is not safeguarding eligibility; it is **weaponizing paperwork to disenfranchise citizens**.

The cumulative message of the SAVE Act to immigrant and Latino communities is clear: “*Show me your papers.*” That message will **scare people away from civic engagement**, and I fear **that** is by design. This is perhaps the most insidious effect – a **deep, cultural discouragement** of voting. The bill would even **shut down voter registration drives** [PAUSE] no more church groups, no more LULAC abuelitas in bingo halls, or community volunteers helping neighbors get registered to vote. Taking all of this away would destroy a grassroots tradition that has empowered Latino and

working-class voters for generations.

Let me be clear: the SAVE Act is **solving a problem that simply does not exist. Noncitizen voting is already illegal** in this country – and it is virtually nonexistent. You’re more likely to be struck by lightning. That’s why we call it “La Gran Mentira”--the big lie. As a Latino leader, I see clearly that this bill trades on a fear of a fully inclusive, multi-racial, multi-ethnic democracy, echoing **the country’s ugly past of voter suppression**.

To conclude: this bill will undermine the right **to vote—which is the crown jewel of our democracy**. As a proud Latino and the son of immigrants, I take this personally. Voting is not just a civic duty for our community; it is a hard-won right that tells us we belong. LULAC was founded 96 years ago by Latino veterans and community leaders who knew that without the vote, we have no true say in our destiny. They fought to tear down barriers – from poll taxes to English-only ballots – that kept “our gente” out of the voting booth.

The SAVE Act threatens to erect new barriers in the 21st century, aimed squarely at the same communities who have struggled so long for an equal vote.

I urge you, in the strongest terms, **do not let that happen.**