



TESTIMONY

03/02/2023

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

SENATOR BRYAN HUGHES - SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

I am Stephanie Swanson, the Issue Chair of Voting Rights for the League of Women Voters of Texas. Today, I will be testifying as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas Against SB 711. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. The League of Women Voters of Texas is one of the oldest grassroots organizations in the state. According to the League's Principles, we seek to achieve equal rights for all; combat discrimination and poverty; and provide equal access to housing, employment, quality education, and health care. We also believe that no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

We would like to start by raising our concerns about the current legislative procedures being used to advance this bill through the senate. The public was only provided 38 hours notice for this hearing, which does not provide enough time to arrange for language interpretation services for members of the public who wish to provide testimony in a language besides English. By providing such short notice for this hearing, the Legislature is sending a clear message that it is not interested in hearing the concerns of its constituents.

SB 711 harkens back to the 1880s and 1920s, when several states passed the so-called Alien Land Laws, which barred Asian people from owning land. In 1952, the Supreme Court ruled that these laws violated the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. The court held that the statutory classification of aliens on the basis of eligibility to citizenship was suspect because it in fact classified on the basis of race or nationality.

SB 711 targets people by their nationality and is not a good way to identify people who are a national security risk. This bill will fuel hostility towards the communities that are being targeted by the legislation and would lead to racial profiling of individuals, which again would violate the Equal protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. According to Madeline Hsu, a history professor and expert in Asian American studies at the University of Texas at Austin, SB 711 "is definitely sort of re-invocation of kind of what people in Asian American studies would refer to as 'Yellow Peril' fearmongering. There are ways in which it resonates with what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II, where regardless of citizenship, regardless of nativity, they were racially categorized as enemy aliens."

Even if the bill language is modified to exclude lawful permanent residents, it would still affect people who are here on a work visa and have an application pending before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), such as for adjustment of status. Therefore, this law would negatively impact the state's ability to recruit and maintain its workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

For additional information, please contact: Stephanie Swanson, Voting Rights Issue Chair, sswanson@lwvtexas.org.

The League of Women Voters is one of America's oldest and most trusted civic nonprofit organizations. Formed in 1919, the League of Women Voters of Texas represents over 13,000 grassroots advocates and 34 local Leagues across the State of Texas.

The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government and seek to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to people 16 and older of all gender identities.