

Ohio bill would shield elections workers' home addresses from public records

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio elections officials would get enhanced privacy when it comes to state public records law if a new bipartisan bill makes it into law.

Currently, a slew of jobs termed “designated public service workers,” including police, judges, parole workers, firefighters EMTs, prison guards, prosecutors and more, are exempt from state public records law. That means these workers and officials’ names don’t appear in property and voting records that typically can be used to figure out where someone lives.

The newly-introduced Senate Bill 173 would add election workers to that exempt list. In an internal Senate memo, the bill’s sponsors, Democratic Sen. Bill Demora, of Columbus, and Republican Sen. Theresa Gavarone, of Bowling Green, said the bill would let elections workers focus on their job rather than worry about their family’s safety.

“Given the increasing polarization of our society, we have seen the dangers that our election workers face,” the memo says.

Particularly as ex-President Donald Trump’s false claims about the 2020 election have spread, [officials have been targeted with threats and other forms of harassment](#), including in states that were instrumental in Democratic President Joe Biden’s victory. In an interview, Demora said while there haven’t been widespread threats in Ohio, which Trump won soundly, he wants to be proactive in case it becomes a problem.

“I’m trying to get something done before somebody gets hurt,” said Demora, who hopes the bill can pass in time to be in effect for next year’s presidential elections in March and November.

In a separate interview, Gavarone said she’s heard about rising levels of aggression, which she thinks comes from both ends of the political spectrum, targeted against elections workers. She cited [an instance in Toledo in August 2022](#) when a man, while

saying negative things about the Democratic Party, threatened to shoot up a polling place there.

“They were arrested but we need to make sure we’re doing what we can to protect these workers,” she said.

Demora said he got the idea for the bill in August, when he attended a conference by the National Conference of State Legislatures, a nonpartisan trade group for lawmakers in Ohio and other states. The involvement of Gavarone, who is close with GOP leadership, gives the bill a better chance of advancing in the Republican-dominated legislature.

“This is not a partisan bill. Its meant to protect our elections officials, who are overworked and underpaid,” Demora said.

Aaron Ockerman, executive director of the Ohio Association of Elections Officials, said he hasn’t spoken with Demora or Gavarone about the bill. But, he said he’s “appreciative of any effort to help protect elections officials.”

He said while threats against elections officials do happen in Ohio, “the intensity and frequency isn’t the same as what we see in other states like Arizona, Pennsylvania and Michigan.”

He said something to consider will be whether the bill also should include enhanced criminal penalties for threats against elections officials, something that’s been proposed at the federal level.

To become law, the bill would need approval from both the Senate and the Republican controlled House before it would head to Republican Gov. Mike DeWine for his signature.

More than a dozen people in other states have been charged [with threatening election workers](#) by a Justice Department unit formed in 2021 to deal with threats against elections workers, [the Associated Press reported in August](#).

[A national survey of elections workers released in April](#) by the Brennan Center for Justice, a left-leaning elections advocacy group, found that nearly three in four elections officials felt that threats against elections workers have become more prevalent in recent years. Thirty percent said they personally had experienced abuse, threats or harassment because of their job, and 22 percent said they personally knew someone who quit because of fears over safety.

