

FL law requires proof of citizenship

Voting rights groups file suit over state measure

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A measure requiring new Florida voters to provide documented proof of U.S. citizenship was signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis despite opponents saying it will keep many women, minorities and older voters from casting ballots.

DeSantis signed the legislation April 1, just hours after President Donald Trump enacted an executive order intended to create a nationwide list of verified eligible voters and restrict mail-in voting.

Voting law experts say Trump's order violates the U.S. Constitution by attempting to seize states' power to run elections and is rooted in his false allegations of fraud.

DeSantis sidestepped the president's action when signing the measure.

"This bill protects and expands integrity in our voter registration process," DeSantis said. "Our constitution in the state of Florida says only American citizens are allowed to vote in our elections. So we need to make sure that is the law."

The new law takes effect Jan. 1, 2027, so it will not affect voter registration leading into the November midterm elections, when Floridians also will elect a new governor to succeed the term-limited DeSantis.

A coalition of 10 voting rights organizations sued the state in Miami federal court. Opponents, including the Florida League of Women Voters, Florida Rising, Common Cause and the Hispanic Federation, say the measure violates the U.S. Constitution by placing an undue burden on the right to vote.

The law "will make it harder for eligible U.S. citizens to vote – and for some, impossible," the 60-page lawsuit says.

Voters already swear an oath of citizenship when they register, and voting records show there's no validity to



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claims about noncitizens packing polling places.

Florida's Office of Election Crimes and Security reported that only 198 noncitizens in 2025 were registered to vote out of the statewide voter roll of 13.3 million Floridians.

Trump's own Department of Homeland Security has found that out of 49.5 million voter registrations reviewed, 10,000 were further examined as possible noncitizen registrations. It was unclear how many were found to be noncitizens and whether any had voted.

Jessica Lowe-Minor, president of the Florida League of Women Voters, called the change a "major step backward" for the state.

Supporters, though, said those registering to vote with a Florida driver's license compliant with federal Real ID standards should have no problem. The vast majority of Florida drivers have such licenses, records show.

But as the voting rights groups point out in their lawsuit, Real ID Florida drivers' licenses can be legally obtained by noncitizens with immigration green cards or with asylum status.

The lawsuit also questions the accuracy of citizenship data included within the state's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. The new law

requires elections officials to access this data when verifying someone's legal status to register.

"It is an enormous burden on voters, especially on those who don't have a Florida driver's license or state ID," said Amy Keith, executive director of Florida Common Cause.

She said older Floridians, first-time voters, those who've lost documents and women who changed their surname through marriage could be barred from voting.

"To place this burden in front of thousands of Floridians is just inexcusable," Keith said.

For those whose citizenship status cannot be confirmed, challenges would emerge when registering to vote or when current voters change their address or party registration.

In such cases, elections officials would need to be presented an original or copy of a birth certificate, a valid passport, naturalization certificate or some other document displaying proof of U.S. citizenship.

The legislation was overwhelmingly approved by Republican supermajorities in the Florida House and Senate.

The Florida law includes many of the provisions of the federal Safeguard American Voter Eligibility, or SAVE, Act,

which Trump has pushed through the U.S. House but which has stalled in the Senate and looks unlikely to pass.

DeSantis' team tried to emphasize his adherence to Trump by placing a "Florida's SAVE Act" sign on the lectern he used at the April 1 signing event.

"While the important debate over the SAVE America Act happens on the national stage, we can, and must, continue to lead in Florida as the gold standard in election integrity," Republican state Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka said earlier of the House bill she sponsored.

Persons-Mulicka and Republican state Sen. Erin Grall, who sponsored the bill in that chamber, were among the GOP leaders joining DeSantis at the bill signing.

Democrats and dozens of citizens and representatives of voter groups had testified at legislative committees against the legislation.

"We want a democracy that brings people in, but the Legislature continues to find ways to exclude people and keep people out, really without justification," said Brad Ashwell, Florida director of All Voting is Local, a national organization that advances pro-voter policies.

The latest swipe at election laws follows a pattern in the state. Since 2020, DeSantis and the Republican-controlled Legislature have enacted changes to make it more difficult to vote by mail, help other people register to vote, register to vote after a felony conviction or have citizens' initiatives gain ballot access.

"You can have the best rules in the world, but if people violate the rules and nothing happens, they're not worth as much," DeSantis said.

Along with the documented proof of citizenship, the legislation signed by DeSantis requires candidates to disclose whether they are dual citizens of another country.

It also requires the state's Office of Election Crimes and Security to include any violations or irregularities involving foreign nationals in state elections in its annual report.

Candidates for federal offices will also be required to disclose whether they intend to trade stocks while in office.

Warming climate may threaten WI maple syrup

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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

MILWAUKEE – One of Charles James' favorite childhood memories is making syrup in the spring from the dozens of maple trees in his parents' backyard on the Menominee Reservation in northwest Wisconsin.

Of the tribe's 235,000 acres, about 95% are heavily forested. And of the 1 billion or so trees on the reservation, about 23% are sugar maples, ideal for tapping to make maple syrup and sugar.

James remembers other tribal families would have sugar camps in late winter and early spring, uniting to divide the labor-intensive process of turning sap into syrup and then sugar. Those families are among thousands of maple syrup producers across Wisconsin, ranging from hobbyists to commercial enterprises.

However, as much as maple syrup has become a staple of culture in Wisconsin and some other states, there is concern that climate change could bring it to an end in a generation, at least in the southern part of Wisconsin.

Temperatures have warmed enough that scientists contend March has become part of spring instead of winter, leading the maple sap collecting season to shift earlier in the year, according to University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers.

With the growing season starting earlier and lasting longer, maple trees will grow taller. The more they grow, the more they will need to consume their own sugar, leaving less sap to be tapped for syrup.

In a few decades, along what is now the southern edge of Wisconsin's current sugar maple range, tapping may become impractical, the researchers suggest.

"The climate has been a factor through the years," said Theresa Baroun, director of the Wisconsin Maple Syrup Producers Association. "May" is the keyword. We don't know what will happen in 30 years."

Wisconsin's maple syrup produc-



Menominee tribal member Charles James uses a traditional process of making maple sugar. JOVANNY HERNANDEZ/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

tion in 2025 was 556,000 gallons, up 98,000 gallons from 2024, Baroun said. That lifted the state to the third-largest producer in the United States, behind Vermont and New York. It had been fourth, but surpassed Maine.

Indigenous peoples in North America taught the first European colonizers how to tap maple trees to make maple sugar or syrup, according to historians.

James had gotten away from maple tapping and other harvesting in the Menominee Forest as he grew older. But he recently started tapping again in earnest now that he has his own family. He wanted to pass down the tradition to his three boys, ages 4, 10 and 17 and, now, an infant daughter.

His wife, Carol, has expanded the operation to make cakes, suckers and other sweets from the maple sap to give out to relatives and friends.

Four types of maple trees can be tapped for their sap to make syrup: sugar, silver, red and black. Sugar maple produces the highest sugar content.

If tapping maple trees along the southern range fades, harvesters can look toward other trees, such as black walnut and birch.

As for the northern part of the state, climate change is also affecting the tapping season.

James said he remembers not too long ago it wouldn't start until mid-March. Now, it can start in early February and wrap up by the end of March.

But the harvest does not appear vulnerable. And for people like James, that means traditions can carry on.

U.S. Forest Service to relocate headquarters

Terry Collins

USA TODAY

The U.S. Forest Service is relocating its headquarters to Salt Lake City, citing the move as a "sweeping restructuring" of the agency, the Department of Agriculture said.

The agency's move from its current location in Washington, DC, to Utah's capital city is part of a broader strategy to place the Forest Service closer to the Western states that comprise the majority of the 193 million-acre forest system, the USDA announced March 31.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said in a statement that the relocation will improve the Forest Service's mission of managing its forests, saving taxpayers' money and boosting employee recruitment.

"Establishing a western headquarters in Salt Lake City and streamlining how the Forest Service is organized will position the Chief and operation leaders closer to the landscapes we manage and the people who depend on them," Rollins said.

"This includes supporting our timber growers across the country, including those in the Southeast, by prioritizing a regional office and promoting policies that boost timber production, lowering costs for consumers," Rollins added.

The Forest Service's move comes after the 2019 relocation of the Bureau of Land Management headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado, during President Donald Trump's first term in office, which led to a vast majority of the staff leaving the agency, only for the BLM to return to Washington. The BLM manages public lands in several Western states, performing activities such as oil, gas and agricultural leases.

About 260 headquarters positions will relocate to Utah, while 130 will remain in Washington, the Forest Service said. Additional phases of the reorganization, including the formal elimination of regional and station office structures and the full transition to a state-based model, will be implemented over



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ANDREW KELLY/REUTERS FILE

the coming year.

As part of its restructure, the Forest Service will establish 15 state directors to oversee its operations, the USDA said. Each state office will include a small leadership support team responsible for functions such as legislative affairs, communications and intergovernmental coordination.

"This approach is intended to simplify the chain of command, strengthen local partnerships, and give field leaders greater ability to respond to conditions on the ground," the USDA said.

The Forest Service will also begin transitioning to a "state-based organizational model" to shift authority closer to the field, a goal the administration has been emphasizing since the beginning of the second Trump administration, the USDA said.

Additionally, "operational service centers" will be formed in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Athens, Georgia; Fort Collins, Colorado; Madison, Wisconsin; Missoula, Montana; and Placerville, California. More service center locations may be added as the transition progresses, the USDA said.

The Forest Service said research operations will also be consolidated as the agency has previously mentioned. Research facilities now located in multiple regions will fall under a central research organization based in Fort Collins, the agency said.