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LWV LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS

To: Partners
From: Democracy Forward Foundation, CREW, EPIC, and League of Women Voters
Re: Explainer: DHS's Unreliable SAVE System Can no Longer be Used to Purge Voter Rolls
Date: July 10, 2026

On June 22, 2026, in *League of Women Voters v. Department of Homeland Security* (1:25-cv-03501, DDC), a federal court held that the Trump-Vance administration's effort to expand the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) "SAVE" system to be used as a tool to purge voters from state voter rolls is unlawful. The below explainer describes the importance of the district court decision, however, note that this ruling has been appealed and the litigation is ongoing.

Background

- In 1986, Congress created the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) [system](#) for the limited purpose of verifying whether noncitizens were eligible for government benefits.
- In March 2025, President Trump issued an [Executive Order](#) directing federal agencies to facilitate state efforts to verify the citizenship of registered voters using federal databases.
- To implement the Executive Order, DHS, the Social Security Administration (SSA), and U.S. Department of Government Efficiency significantly expanded SAVE by: giving the SAVE system access to records of U.S.-born citizens for the first time; permitting SAVE users to conduct searches of the database using Social Security Numbers; giving the SAVE system access to SSA's citizenship records, passport data, and state driver's license data; creating a bulk search feature, allowing users to search data for more than one individual at a time; and making the SAVE system free for users.
- The expanded SAVE system created significant privacy and security risks by consolidating sensitive personal information from multiple federal agencies that the government knew to be incomplete and unreliable and enabling states to run their voter registration rolls through that database for citizenship verification and voter purging.

Decision

- The League of Women Voters (LWV), LWV of Louisiana and LWV Education Fund of Louisiana, LWV of Texas, and the LWV of Virginia, and the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) [filed](#) suit challenging the changes to the SAVE system. *The plaintiffs are represented by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics (CREW), Democracy Forward Foundation, and Fair Elections Center.*
- Plaintiffs argued that, in modifying the SAVE system, the agencies violated numerous federal laws and created a substantial risk that eligible voters would be wrongly flagged as noncitizens and removed from the voter rolls.
- On June 22, 2026, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia granted summary judgment and [held](#) that the SAVE system expansion was unlawful, finding that the administration:

- Violated the Social Security Act by improperly disclosing SSA records to DHS and SAVE system users.
- Violated the Privacy Act by allowing non-consensual disclosures of personal information and by failing to comply with the Act’s notice-and-comment requirements before fundamentally changing the system; and
- Violated the Administrative Procedure Act because the agencies acted arbitrarily and capriciously and exceeded their statutory authority by implementing the overhaul without congressional authorization.
- On June 25, 2026, the administration appealed the decision, and on July 1, 2026, filed a motion to stay the district court’s decision pending appeal.
- On July 8, 2026, the district court [denied](#) the motion for stay, concluding that the defendants “fall well short of satisfying the high burden needed for a stay pending appeal.” The court’s decision stated that the government not only engaged in “gamesmanship” and “mischaracterized” the court’s reasoning in seeking to block its decision, but the entire situation is entirely “self-inflicted,” and its litigation tactics “make a mockery of separation of powers.”
- The proceedings are ongoing, but absent the grant of a stay, the administration must comply with the district court’s order.
- *Note: In parallel, Florida, Ohio, Iowa, and Indiana have asked a federal district court in the Northern District of Florida (24-cv-509, N.D. Fla.) to enforce a November 2025 settlement agreement that, the states contend, requires DHS to operate the expanded SAVE system. On July 7, 2026, the court in Florida ordered DHS to restore the states’ access to the bulk-upload and SSN-search features in the SAVE system, recognizing that this presents a conflict with the D.C. district court’s order. LWV and EPIC—represented by CREW, Democracy Forward Foundation, and Fair Elections Center—have moved to intervene in that litigation. The developments in that case will affect the import of the decision in the League of Women Voters v. DHS case.*

Takeaways

- The ruling significantly weakens the administration’s efforts to use federal databases to influence state voter list maintenance and provides a strong statutory framework for challenging similar initiatives going forward.
 - DHS cannot require states to submit their voter registration rolls for bulk verification through SAVE, including by [conditioning](#) federal funding tied to participation.
 - State election officials can no longer use SAVE to conduct bulk citizenship verification by uploading statewide voter registration rolls.
- This decision is one of the most significant judicial setbacks to the Trump-Vance administration’s elections-related executive actions, although the litigation is ongoing.
 - The decision substantially limits implementation of President Trump's March 2026 [Executive Order](#), which sought to limit mail-in voting. DHS cannot use the expanded SAVE system to create the “State Citizenship Lists” contemplated by Section 2 of the Executive Order. The ruling also prevents DHS and SSA from relying on their 2025 Systems of Records Notices (SORNs) to share data to implement the Executive Order.

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- *Note: A separate federal court has also recently [enjoined](#) much of the Executive Order, as to the plaintiff twenty-three states and the District of Columbia.*
- Unless the decision is stayed or reversed on appeal, DHS and SSA cannot use the expanded SAVE system or the vacated data-sharing authorities to facilitate bulk citizenship verification of voter registration rolls. Note, however, that the ongoing litigation in the Northern District of Florida might affect the ultimate outcome

Note: This case is ongoing. Please check the docket for the latest information [here](#), as well as the docket for the related case in the Northern District of Florida [here](#).

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