



OPPOSE VOTER ID LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Voter ID laws are becoming increasingly common across the country. Today, 30 states require voters to present identification to vote in federal, state and local elections, although some laws passed during the 2011 legislative session have not yet gone into effect. In 15 of those states, voters must present a photo ID – that in many states must be government-issued – in order to cast a ballot.

Many Americans do not have the necessary identification that these laws require, and face barriers to voting as a result. Research shows, for example, that more than 21 million Americans do not have government-issued photo identification; a disproportionate number of these Americans are low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, and elderly.

Voter ID laws have the potential to deny the right to vote to thousands of registered voters who do not have, and, in many instances, cannot obtain the limited identification states accept for voting. Many of these Americans cannot afford to pay for the required documents needed to secure a government-issued photo ID. As such, these laws impede access to the polls and are at odds with the fundamental right to vote.

VOTING IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT, NOT A PRIVILEGE

- Nothing is more fundamental to our democracy than the right to vote.
- The right to vote is protected by more constitutional amendments - the 1st, 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th and 26th - than any other right we enjoy as Americans.
- There are additional federal and state statutes which guarantee and protect voting rights, as well as declarations by the Supreme Court that the right to vote is fundamental because it is protective of all our other rights.

VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS ARE A SOLUTION IN SEARCH OF A PROBLEM

- There is no credible evidence that in-person impersonation voter fraud -- the only type of fraud that photo IDs could prevent – is even a minor problem.
- Proponents of voter ID laws have failed to demonstrate that individual, in -person voter fraud is even a minor problem anywhere in the country.
- Multiple studies have found that almost all cases of in-person impersonation voter “fraud” are the result of a voter making an honest mistake, and that even these mistakes are extremely infrequent.
- It is important, instead, to focus on both expanding the franchise and ending practices which actually threaten the integrity of the elections, such as improper purges of voters, voter harassment, and distribution of false information about when and where to vote. None of these issues, however, are addressed or can be resolved with a photo ID requirement.

NO ELIGIBLE CITIZEN SHOULD HAVE TO PAY TO VOTE

- Requiring voters to obtain an ID in order to vote is tantamount to a poll tax. Although some states issue IDs for free, the birth certificates, passports, or other documents required to obtain a government-issued ID cost money, and many Americans simply cannot afford to pay for them.

- In addition, states incur sizable costs when providing IDs to voters who do not have them. Given the financial strain many states already are experiencing, this is an unnecessary allocation of taxpayer dollars.

VOTER ID LAWS ARE DISCRIMINATORY

- Voter ID laws have a disproportionate and unfair impact on low-income individuals, racial and ethnic minority voters, students, senior citizens, voters with disabilities and others who do not have a government-issued ID or the money to acquire one.
- The Supreme Court has held that a state cannot value one person's vote over another and that is exactly what these laws do.
- Research shows that 11% of US citizens – or more than 21 million Americans -- do not have government-issued photo identification.
- As many as 25% of African American citizens of voting age do not have a government-issued photo ID, compared to only 8% of their white counterparts.
- 18% of Americans over the age of 65 (or 6 million senior citizens) do not have a government-issued photo ID.
- In 2008, it was widely reported that Indiana's voter ID law disfranchised 12 nuns who were trying to vote in the primary election. The nuns were all over 80 years old, all had a history of voting in past elections, and none of them drove. Their limited mobility made it difficult for them to get an ID.

VOTER ID LAWS LIMIT VOTERS' ACCESS TO THE VOTING BOOTH AND HINDER THEIR RIGHT TO CAST A BALLOT

- Voter ID laws restrict access to the voting booth. Rather than erecting hurdles that prevent Americans from voting, lawmakers must ensure that every eligible voter is allowed to vote, and that every vote counts.
- Any requirement that citizens show government-issued photo ID at the polls reintroduces an enormous amount of discretion into the balloting process, thus creating opportunities for discrimination at the polls against racial, ethnic and language minority voters.
- Most polling places rely on volunteers or poll workers with minimal training to check in voters and answer questions. There is a risk that inadequately trained workers could turn away and disfranchise even properly documented voters.

OUR COUNTRY HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE PASSAGE OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT; VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS ARE A STEP BACKWARDS

- Voter ID requirements are a dangerous and misguided step backwards in our ongoing quest for a more democratic society.
- Elected officials should be seeking ways to encourage more voters, not inventing excuses to deny voters the ability to cast their ballots. Photo ID requirements present substantial barriers to voting and negatively effect voter participation.
- Today, 30 states have enacted discriminatory voter ID laws that prevent citizens from voting, and more states are considering such restrictive and discriminatory laws.
- The history of our nation is characterized by a gradual expansion of voting rights. As our democracy continued to evolve with the right to vote has been expanded to include most Americans.

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