

The Proposed 2011 Voter ID Bill

Our Position

Democracy North Carolina is dedicated to increasing voter participation as part of our mission to create a government of, by and for the people of our state. We are strongly opposed to the Voter ID Bill because it is an unnecessary and expensive solution to a problem that barely exists; would waste millions in tax dollars needed for other purposes; and would disenfranchise honest citizens. There are more effective and far less expensive ways to deal with what little voter fraud actually exists.

Why We Take This Position

- ▶ **Widespread voter fraud is a myth.** Investigations conducted in state after state proved voter fraud rarely occurs. In fact, the rate was only five cases per one million votes in NC from 2004 to 2010. This means you are more likely to be struck by lightning in NC than have someone steal your vote.
- ▶ **Current laws to stop voter fraud work.** New voters are required to prove their identity when they first register to vote and it's already a felony to vote illegally in NC or to lie when you sign in to vote. Plus a system exists in NC allowing poll observers from both parties to challenge voters they believe are ineligible. Low rates of voter fraud in NC make it clear that these protections are effective.
- ▶ **This bill would cost millions each year – up to \$20 million total –** and it comes at a time when our state and our counties can least afford new programs.
- ▶ **It would be more efficient and cheaper to fight fraud** by hiring more investigators for the state Board of Elections, making voting technology tamper-proof and training elections staff better.
- ▶ **Lawmakers were sent to Raleigh to fix the economy and budget.** An ID bill would siphon millions from these efforts and use tax money that could save the jobs of teachers and others.
- ▶ **Voter ID laws reduce voter turnout** by creating hassles and making lines longer at the polls. Our state's voter turn-out is already unacceptably low and our democracy cannot afford more drop-off.
- ▶ **Voter ID laws unfairly affect some groups more than others.** The elderly, people of color, students, low income citizens and people with disabilities are all less likely to have a driver's license and more likely to need transportation to DMV offices to obtain or update an ID.
- ▶ **Hundreds of thousands of other honest citizens would be affected,** including people who move frequently, change their names after marrying or who do not drive.
- ▶ **For people without a driver's license, the time and money needed to obtain an official government ID is like a poll tax –** a barrier long used to deny African-Americans the vote.
- ▶ **This bill treats voters unequally.** Mail-in absentee ballot voters would be exempt from showing ID, but not college students. Why? We worry it is because most absentee ballots in NC are requested by Republicans, the party promoting this bill, while college students tend to vote for Democrats. Democracy should not be manipulated for partisan purposes.
- ▶ **Requiring a voter ID is not consistent with a leaner, less intrusive government.** In fact, it moves us closer to a society where everyone must carry papers to prove their citizenship.

The Facts About Voter ID

Evidence that voter fraud is not as widespread as the bill's sponsors claim:

- ▶ Thorough investigations by the State Board of Elections found that only 5 votes per million cast in North Carolina from 2004 to 2010 involved fraud that a Voter ID would have stopped.
- ▶ For five years, the Bush administration focused on alleged "voter fraud" but, despite the Dept. of Justice's access to the vast resources of the federal government, by April 2007 only 120 persons in the entire nation had been charged with and even fewer convicted of actual voter fraud. Most of the cases involved voter misinformation and misunderstanding of eligibility requirements, the type of voting irregularities that requiring an ID would not prevent.
- ▶ The rate of fraud uncovered by the Department of Justice's efforts is less than one incident per every two states each year.
- ▶ Penalties for voter fraud include hefty fines, lengthy prison sentences, and, in the case of fraudulent voting by non-citizens, the revocation of legal status and deportation. Why would someone risk these penalties for so little gain? It makes no sense.

Evidence that honest citizens will be disenfranchised as a result of this bill:

- ▶ As part of the debate over a Voter ID law, South Carolina election officials found that 7% of voters did not have a current government ID. At that rate, over 400,000 registered voters in NC would be ineligible to vote because they lack ID. In other studies, the rate was found to be as high as 11%.
- ▶ In 2010, the DMV issued 138,130 photo ID cards, mostly to children who need identification. Overall, 1.4 million North Carolina residents have DMV ID cards. The cards are valid for five to eight years, cost \$10 and must be obtained in person. ID card applicants face additional expenses as they must present a Social Security card and, if they don't have one, may need to obtain a copy of their birth certificate.

Evidence that other states have recognized the drawbacks of similar bills:

- ▶ 23 out of 50 U.S. states don't require the voter to show a document each time they vote; 27 states do. Twelve of those 27 states allow voters to present a wide range of documents to prove their ID, while ten others allow voters to sign an affidavit or sworn statement, under penalty of a felony, that they are who say they are, and then vote a regular ballot.
- ▶ Only ten states have felt it necessary to impose standards stricter than the Help America Vote Act, a federal law passed after the 2000 Presidential election which, among other things, mandated that all states and localities upgrade their registration processes to certain standards. When a new voter registers to vote or goes to vote for the first time, HAVA requires that they show a current and valid photo identification or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter.

- ▶ Only two states (Georgia and Indiana) require a government-issued photo ID. And in one of them, Georgia, lawmakers came under fire for failing to properly set aside funds for their program, sticking counties with millions in expenses.

Evidence that implementing this bill could cost North Carolina millions of dollars a year (courtesy of the Institute for Southern Studies):

- ▶ North Carolina faces a \$3.7 billion budget gap and the need to make cuts in virtually every area, from education to care for the elderly to youth services and more.
- ▶ The Institute for Southern Studies estimates an effective, full-scale voter ID program could cost state taxpayers \$20 million or more – the same cost estimated by Missouri officials in 2010.
- ▶ Voter ID laws require major publicity and education efforts to avoid voter confusion and make sure legitimate voters aren't turned away at the polls. In 2010, Missouri estimated it would cost \$16.9 million for TV, radio and newspaper announcements and other outreach to the state's 4 million voters. North Carolina has even more voters: over 6 million and growing.
- ▶ Studies show that up to 11% of citizens don't have a photo ID, but courts have ruled that forcing voters to buy cards amounts to a modern-day poll tax, leaving states without free ID card provisions vulnerable to lawsuits. To solve the problem, many states now issue free ID cards, but it's expensive: In 2009, Wisconsin (3.5 million voters) projected a total \$2.4 million cost for free IDs while Missouri estimated \$3.4 million.
- ▶ Voter ID laws generate dozens of other costs for state and local officials: accommodating longer lines at DMV offices, updating forms and websites plus hiring and training staff to handle provisional ballots for those who don't have ID on Election Day. In 2009, Maryland estimated it would cost one county over \$95,000 a year just to hire and train precinct judges to examine IDs of voters.
- ▶ State government and local governments are already cutting programs and staff to the bone. Having to appropriate millions of dollars each year to cover the expenses required by a Voter ID bill would mean cutbacks in service and layoffs for whichever government entity ends up having to pay for implementing the new law.