



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

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IN OPPOSITION TO S.440, S.464, H.638, H.649, H.650, H.652, H.680, H.692, H.695, and H.709 Relating to Voter Identifications Requirements

Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Election Laws
June 13, 2007

By Carole Pelchat, Vice President

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly urges you to oppose all bills related to expanding voter ID requirements. All of these bills will make it more difficult to vote and have a chilling effect on voter participation.

Under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), states must, among other things, require all voters to provide their driver's license number or the last four digits of their social security number when registering to vote. HAVA also requires first-time voters who registered by mail to produce suitable identification (suitable identification includes a copy of a current and valid photo identification, current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document showing your name and address) before voting. The League believes these current requirements for identification are more than adequate to prevent fraud.

Expansion of voter identification requirements beyond what is mandated by the Help America Vote Act will suppress voter turnout, be burdensome to voters and election officials, and create barriers - especially for voters who are disabled, are members of a racial or ethnic minority, are new citizens, or are young voters.

Photo ID requirements disproportionately impact those who are least likely to have current photo ID: the elderly, young people, people of color, rural voters, individuals with disabilities and frequent movers. At the polls, acceptance of the ID would be determined by poll workers and election officials. Such tests and devices have historically resulted in discrimination and disenfranchisement of eligible voters.

Many Americans live in domiciles as roommates, spouses, or relatives, or live on a college campus, where their name is not on the lease or on utility bills. This means they do not have these items as forms of identification at the polls.

In February of 2007, the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University completed a study that examined the 2004 election and concluded that in states requiring voters to present an ID at the polls, voters were 2.7 percent less likely to vote than in states where voters were merely required to state their names. Their research is supported by a poll conducted by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law in November of 2006 that found as many as 11 percent of Americans - more than 21 million individuals - do not have a current, government-issued ID. These individuals include 6 million elderly, 15 % of voting-age citizens who earn less than \$35,000 a year, and 25 % of voting-age African-Americans.

In Massachusetts in November 2001, a federal court outlawed an identification requirement at the polls in Lawrence. Both the U.S. Department of Justice and private plaintiffs argued, and the court correctly

found, that “the burden imposed by this requirement will fall disproportionately on the Latin American community.”

Adding photo ID requirements will also add a layer of procedural complexity to the voting process that runs the risk of increasing procedural errors by already overtaxed poll workers. It will also cause already-long lines to get even longer, often discouraging eligible voters.

The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy, and voting should be as easy and accessible as possible. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges an unfavorable vote on S.440, S.464, H.638, H.649, H.650, H.652, H.680, H.692, H.695, and H.709.