



## Talking Points Proof of Citizenship and ID Requirements

### Proof-of-Citizenship Requirements: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Poll Tax

- **Citizens should not have to pay a fee to register to vote.**

Proof-of- citizenship requirements invariably put the burden – including the financial burden – on citizens themselves. While it would be ideal if all U.S. citizens had documents such as a passport, a birth certificate, or naturalization papers readily available, the truth is that many do not – which means that many citizens would have to pay for them.

A birth certificate usually costs \$15 to \$20. According to the Department of Bureau of Consular Affairs, only 25-27% of eligible Americans have passports, which now cost \$97. Naturalization papers, if they are lost or damaged and need to be replaced, cost \$220. Proof-of-citizenship requirements generally do not help citizens who don't have the money to pay for these documents. This means that exercising the constitutional right to vote can become “unaffordable” for many citizens, which is completely unacceptable in a democratic society that relies upon full participation of its citizenry.

- **Proof of citizenship may be impossible for some people to obtain, and very hard for others.**

In certain parts of the country, for example, elderly African Americans and many Native Americans were born at home, under the care of midwives, and do not possess birth certificates. People of color, people with disabilities, the elderly, young, and people who live in poverty are among the groups least likely to have documents to prove they are U.S. citizens.

- **Proof-of-citizenship requirements are working to keep legal voters from registering.**

Since Arizona implemented Prop 200, more than 15,000 voter registration applicants have been rejected in Maricopa County alone for failure to provide proof of citizenship. In Pima County, sixty percent of new registrants – all eligible voters – were initially rejected. Similar proof-of-citizenship requirements, if imposed in other states or by Congress, would result in eligible voters being turned away on a nationwide scale.

- **Current laws work when properly enforced.**

Falsely claiming citizenship and voting fraud have long been federal offenses. Proof-of-citizenship requirements will only penalize U.S. citizens who want to exercise their right to vote.

## **Voter Fraud: A Surprisingly Rare Problem**

- **Extensive election misconduct does exist, but it does not include voter impersonation**  
There is no question that election misconduct exists, including improper purges of eligible voters, distributing false information about when and where to vote, stuffing of ballot boxes, and tampering with registration forms. But there is no evidence that the type of fraud cited in support of photo ID requirements – individual voters who misrepresent their identity at the polls – is anything but an anomaly.
- **Ohio – 2002 and 2004**  
A statewide survey found that out of 9,078,728 votes cast, there were only four instances of ineligible persons voting or attempting to vote – a rate of just 0.00004%.
- **Georgia**  
Despite the invocation of fraud as support for the new Georgia law, Secretary of State Cathy Cox stated that, in her ten-year tenure, she could not recall even one documented case of voter fraud involving the impersonation of a registered voter at the polls.
- **Federal Convictions of Election Fraud**  
Nationwide, since October 2002, out of the 196,139,871 ballots that have been cast in federal general elections, only 86 individuals have been convicted of federal crimes relating to election fraud (including several offenses that occurred in spite of ID requirements).

## **Voter ID Requirements: Discouraging Voters, Enabling Discrimination**

- **Restrictive voter ID requirements are more likely to disenfranchise people of color, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, rural voters, young people, the homeless, low-income people, frequent movers, married women, and persons in large households.**  
A recent study by the Georgia Secretary of State found that nearly 700,000 Georgians – 1 in 7 voters – do not have either a driver's license or non-driver state issued ID, and the Department of Transportation estimates that between 6-12% of voters nationally do not have government issued photo ID. A number of other studies have documented that certain segments of the population are far less likely to have photo ID than other Americans. A Univ. of Wisconsin study found that nearly 50% of African American and Latino men in Milwaukee do not have government-issued photo ID.

- **Restrictive ID requirements are the equivalent of a poll tax. This was, in fact, reiterated by the federal district court during the debate over Georgia’s new Photo ID requirement.**

By mandating that voters provide photo identification, most ID laws would require voters to pay for photo ID, if they don’t already have it. Getting the required forms of ID, such as drivers’ licenses and passports, costs money and time away from work. The same is true of getting the supporting documents required to obtain ID. As a result, not all eligible voters in this country can afford to purchase photo ID, and few legislative proposals suggest any realistic way to help them out.

- **Voter ID bills contain anti-immigrant rhetoric.**

Voter ID bills target immigrants, making voting more difficult for minorities and low-income citizens. While legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Help American Vote Act (HAVA) have sought to make it easier for all citizens to vote, voter ID bills negate these substantial steps forward.

- **Even if they have valid ID, many eligible voters will be turned away.**

Voter ID requirements place an inordinate amount of discretion in the hands of overworked (and usually unpaid and sometimes poorly trained) poll workers. Deciding whether a voter matches or does not match the photo in an ID card – which can often be many years old – is a very subjective process and easily prone to mistakes or worse. Because many voter ID laws do not explain how disputes over the validity of an ID card should be handled, and because they often keep voters who don’t have “valid” ID from obtaining provisional ballots, they can easily open the door to widespread racial and ethnic discrimination at polling places. Even under the more lenient requirements of the Help America Vote Act, ID provisions are often implemented in a discriminatory way. According to the nation’s largest nonpartisan exit poll of Asian Americans, nearly 70% of Asian voters were asked for ID *in states where no ID was required*.

Voters with valid ID can be turned away for more benign reasons as well. If an ID card such as a driver’s license does not contain the voter’s current address, for example, which is true of millions of Americans, he or she is likely to be turned away from the polls. In Wisconsin, 97% of all students do not have their current address on their photo ID. If an eligible voter forgets to bring ID, some jurisdictions would keep him or her from obtaining a provisional ballot (and proving his or her identity before the ballot is counted). In doing so, they undermine an important “safety net” under the Help America Vote Act.