



## LEGISLATIVE ISSUE BRIEF

### Intentional Barriers to Voter Participation (Photo ID)

[Status of **Assembly Bill 7**: Passed the Assembly on May 11. All Republicans voted in favor, along with Rep. Ziegelbauer (I) and Rep. Krusick (D) and Rep. Staskunas (D). The Senate is prepared to take a final vote on AB 7 by May 20 so that the bill will go to the Governor for signature this week.]

**Assembly Bill 7** makes major changes to voting rights in Wisconsin. The most significant is the requirement that **voters must produce an approved photo ID in order to vote—beginning with the 2012 elections**. (There are only a few exceptions, such as for those living in retirement homes and nursing homes). A voter without an official photo ID can cast a “provisional ballot”, but will need to bring the required identification to the polls before they close, or bring it to the city, village or town clerk by the Friday after the election.

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**For elections held in 2011 (such as the recall elections), poll workers are required to ask for a photo ID from each voter, *but the person cannot be denied the right to cast a ballot if they do not have such identification.***

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Changes that do take place immediately include: (a) early voting period begins the third Monday before the election (now 30 days) and ends on the Friday before the election (now through the day before election); (b) voters will be required to sign poll books when they vote; and (c) voters must live in the ward 28 consecutive days before they vote (now 10 days). There are also special requirements for students to prove residency when they register to vote that go into effect immediately (in addition to proof of identification in 2012).

(For a summary of all election-related changes in AB 7 prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council, go to [www.legis.state.wi.us](http://www.legis.state.wi.us), enter Assembly Bill 7 and hit on the link to “AB 7 LC Amendment Memo.”)

Some may think it is reasonable to ask voters to produce an official photo ID, especially when many people already have a driver’s license. However, this legislation is being promoted by Republicans because there are groups of voters that tend to vote Democratic who are not as likely to have the required official photo ID and will face major obstacles to secure one from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), where there already are long lines due to cutbacks in public employees. Voters impacted by

AB 7 will be lower income workers, the elderly, those with disabilities, transit riders, university students and people of color.

“This is one of the most transparent political power moves in recent memory...meant to give more clout to Republicans by making it more difficult for a population that tends to vote Democratic to actually be able to vote.” (“Voter ID Bill Is All About Political Power”, Neil Heinen, Channel 3000)

The following statistics outline the population that lacks a driver’s license and would need to obtain an alternative state-issued ID: (“Driver License Status of the Voting Age Population in Wisconsin”, UW-Milwaukee, June 2005)

- 23 percent of all elderly over the age of 65 (estimated to be 177,000)
- 17 percent of white men and women
- 55 percent of all African-American males and 49 percent of African-American women
- 46 percent of Hispanic men and 59 percent of Hispanic women

Supporters of these major obstacles to voting claim that they are needed to address voter fraud. Yet, they have totally failed to produce any evidence of widespread, systematic voter fraud in Wisconsin (or in any other state). Most of the mistakes made are related to honest errors by poll workers. The Wisconsin Department of Justice established a special task force to combat voter fraud in the 2008 election. As of January 2011, the Justice Department had charged two people with double voting, six people with voter registration misconduct and 11 people with violating the prohibition on felons voting—all of which were successfully prosecuted under the current system. (“Voter ID bill is harmful and unnecessary”, Wausau Daily Herald, May 9, 2011) The photo ID requirement actually does nothing to prevent a felon from securing a photo ID to vote, yet it will discourage countless voters from even going to the polls—or deny them a lawful ballot once there.

Currently, only 8 out of 50 states require a photo ID to be shown at the polls. Another 18 require a wide array of other non-photo ID and 24 states require neither. AB 7 creates the most restrictive form of ID requirements and makes Wisconsin the most difficult state in the nation in which to cast a vote.

State implementation of AB 7 and its photo ID requirements will cost taxpayers more than \$7 million over the next two years alone. This is mainly because DMV will provide free photo IDs so that this requirement is not challenged as an illegal “poll tax.”

Republicans argue that consumers who purchase certain items are required to show IDs so this is no different. There is no comparison. The right to vote is guaranteed to citizens of Wisconsin in our state constitution. The right to rent a movie is not. The right to vote is essential to our democratic process. These barriers to voting that discriminate against certain individuals and groups will undermine the legitimacy of Wisconsin elections.

For further information: Stephanie Bloomingdale, Secretary-Treasurer, ([sbloomingdale@wisaficio.org](mailto:sbloomingdale@wisaficio.org)) or 414.771.0700, ext. 12; or Joanne Ricca ([jricca@wisaficio.org](mailto:jricca@wisaficio.org) at ext. 24]

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JR/ls:opeiu#9,afl-cio

