

MYTHS AND FACTS: VOTER ID LAWS

MYTH: Photo IDs already are required for everything from boarding a plane to getting a library card. It makes sense to require a picture ID for voting.

FACT: Unlike boarding a plane or obtaining a library card, voting is a fundamental right, not a privilege. Over the course of history, groups on the margins of society have fought and sometimes died to protect the right to vote. Voting is crucial to our democracy.

MYTH: Voter ID laws do not disenfranchise anyone.

FACT: Requiring photo identification to vote will disproportionately affect voters of color, senior citizens, the disabled, young voters and the working poor. Eighteen percent of citizens ages 65 and older do not have a current government-issued photo ID.¹ This amounts to more than 6 million senior citizens.

Among African American voting-age citizens, 25 percent do not have a current government-issued photo ID, compared with 8 percent of white voting-age citizens.² At least 15 percent of voting-age citizens earning less than \$35,000 per year do not have a valid government-issued photo ID.³

About 18 percent of citizens ages 18 to 24 do not have photo ID with current address and name. In some states, student IDs issued by colleges and universities don't fit the laws' strict and burdensome requirements.⁴

MYTH: Photo IDs cost little to nothing and are easy to obtain.

FACT: Many of the laws may be legally flawed and constitute a "poll tax" because they impose undue costs and burdens on citizens attempting to exercise their right to vote. To avoid a claim that the photo ID requirement is a poll tax, states must offer the identification cards needed to vote free of charge. However, voters still must pay for and provide the underlying documents needed to obtain the "free" ID, such as a birth certificate or naturalization papers. A certified birth certificate can cost up to \$45.⁵ A driver's license can cost anywhere from \$20 to \$100.

Also, this doesn't factor in workers' lost time from work just to go to the state motor vehicle agency or a specific location to obtain the ID. In addition, IDs are not easy to obtain. In places like Wisconsin, voters must ask for the ID for free or they will be charged the fee for the identification.

Providing free IDs only will add to the financial crisis many states already are facing. According to a recent report by Advancement Project, photo ID proposals will cost cash-strapped states up to \$20 million to implement.⁶ A Facing South/Institute for Southern Studies analysis concludes that a full-scale voter ID program easily could cost North Carolina taxpayers \$18 million to \$25 million

over three years, slightly more than the estimated price tag for a similar program in Missouri.⁷ Those costs include the price for the state to issue free cards to avoid costly lawsuits, voter education and publicity to inform voters and ensure they aren't turned away at the polls, and dozens of new costs for state and local officials, from updating forms and websites to hiring and training staff to inspect IDs and handle provisional ballots on Election Day.

MYTH: Voter ID laws are needed to combat fraud.

FACT: There's little evidence widespread voter fraud actually exists. A five-year investigation by President George W. Bush's Department of Justice netted only 86 convictions for improper voting out of millions of votes cast.⁸

1 www.brennancenter.org/page/-/d/download_file_39242.pdf

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 www.advancementproject.org/sites/default/files/publications/Picture%20ID6%20low.pdf

6 www.southernstudies.org/2011/01/voter-id-laws-carry-hefty-price-tag-for-cash-strapped-states.html

7 *Ibid.*

8 www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/washington/12fraud.html?pagewanted=all