



**Testimony for the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee
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SARA LOVE
PUBLIC POLICY
DIRECTOR

SB 268 Election Law - Qualification of Voters - Proof of Identity

OPPOSE

The ACLU of Maryland opposes any legislation that would create onerous and illegal voter ID requirements at the polling place. SB 268 is wholly unnecessary and will depress voter turnout in poor and minority communities.

Photo ID requirements are a solution in search of a problem.

Although at first glance this bill may seem harmless, it is in fact a radical departure from American history and will disfranchise more eligible voters than any tactic since the poll tax.

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
OF MARYLAND

MAIN OFFICE
& MAILING ADDRESS
3600 CLIPPER MILL ROAD
SUITE 350
BALTIMORE, MD 21211
T/410-889-8555
or 240-274-5295
F/410-366-7838

FIELD OFFICE
6930 CARROLL AVENUE
SUITE 410
TAKOMA PARK, MD 20912
T/240-274-5295

WWW.ACLU-MD.ORG

COLEMAN BAZELON
PRESIDENT

SUSAN GOERING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANDREW FREEMAN
GENERAL COUNSEL

There are numerous problems with elections in the United States. Voter intimidation, vote suppression, misinformation, inaccurate registration lists, and voting technology that either does not work perfectly or is mistrusted by voters. Voter impersonation is not one of the significant problems.

For over 200 years, America has conducted elections without requiring voters to present ID on election day. The only time in our history in which there was a requirement for voters to possess paperwork was when some states required production of a poll tax receipt in order to vote. So why are bills requiring voter photo IDs being introduced in the states? Proponents contend the intent is to prevent vote fraud. When the evidence fails to support that argument, they contend that IDs are necessary because voters do not trust the election system.

Demanding a particular government-issued document in order to exercise the fundamental right to vote is contrary to Supreme Court precedent

In *Dunn v. Blumstein*, 405 U.S. 330 (1972), the Supreme Court invalidated a state law that required residency for a year before voting. The state had justified it as a way of proving each voter was a bona fide resident. The Court said the state had many ways of establishing a voter's qualifications, and criminal penalties for fraud, so it could not enforce a residency requirement. Several state courts have also rejected the implementation of voter ID laws. A Pennsylvania state court halted enforcement of the state's voter ID law because the voter ID requirement may have led to voter disenfranchisement. *Applewhite v. Pennsylvania*, 2012 WL 4497211 (Pa. Cmwlth. Oct. 2, 2012). In South Carolina, a U.S. District court panel blocked the South Carolina voter ID law from taking effect before the 2012 election. *South Carolina v. U.S.*, 898 F.Supp.2d 30 (Dist Ct D.C. Oct. 10, 2012). In Texas, a U.S. District Court blocked Texas' voter ID law because it

discriminated against minorities and conflicted with the federal Voting Rights Act.¹ *Texas v. Holder*, 888 F.Supp.2d 113 (Dist Ct D.C. Aug. 30, 2012).

Voter ID requirements claim to be aimed at in-person voter impersonation. That crime is near non-existent because it is both high risk and inefficient

On February 7, 2013, this committee held a hearing on a voter identification bill. At that hearing, Linda Lamone from the Maryland Board of Elections testified that she was unaware of a single instance of voter fraud in Maryland. Since that time there have been reports of voters voting in both Virginia and Maryland.² While it is likely that the majority of the cases cited by the conservative advocacy groups are due to clerical error and not double voting,³ importantly these were not cases of voter impersonation where an ID would have made a difference – the voters used their own name. So even if all the people cited had voted in both Maryland and Virginia and even if Maryland had a voter ID law, that law would not have stopped the double voting.

Furthermore, studies and other states' testimonies bear out that fraud is minimal and is not likely to impact election results. The Secretary of State of Georgia testified that in her decade of experience, not a single claim of voter impersonation had been brought to her or to the state election board, and that the procedures in place would have revealed such practices if they had occurred.

Campaigns are competitive processes, and candidates do not risk felonies for a few votes. If an election is close, they devote their efforts to turnout, not identifying who won't turnout and then soliciting an impersonator. In order to impersonate a voter, the campaign has to know that the voter has not voted earlier in the day or by absentee, will not vote later in the day, will not be known to the poll workers and others at the polling place, and that the impersonator will not be known at the polling place. Impersonators could only visit a handful of precincts on election day. To steal 100 votes would take all this knowledge and maybe a dozen impersonators, all of whom are willing to risk multiple felony convictions and who have engaged in a conspiracy with someone in the campaign. In small jurisdictions, with a few hundred voters, the risk of exposure is extremely high. In larger races, even a statistical dead heat can have a margin of victory in the thousands of votes, a number far too high to achieve by this type of fraud.

Voter ID requirements disproportionately affect the poor

Proponents also argue that one illegal vote is one too many. The reverse should also be true—rejecting legal voters is unacceptable. Studies have documented that certain segments of our society—the elderly, people with disabilities, the poor and people of color—are less likely to have government issued IDs. These otherwise-eligible voters would be rejected simply for lack of ID.

¹ It was estimated that Texas' voter ID law at issue could have prevented 1.5 million Texas voters from casting their ballot in the 2012 election, the majority of whom are Hispanic or Black.

² http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-08-28/news/bs-md-election-referrals-20140828_1_elections-board-state-board-nikki-baines-charlson

³ See e.g. http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-09-02/news/bs-ed-voter-fraud-20140902_1_voter-rolls-clerical-error-double-voting

Research has shown that 11% of US citizens—more than 21 million Americans—lack government-issued IDs, as many as 25% of African American citizens of voting age do not have a government-issued photo ID, compared to only 8% of their white counterparts, and 18% of Americans over the age of 65 (or 6 million senior citizens) do not have a government-issued photo ID.⁴ In 2008, it was widely reported that Indiana’s voter ID law disfranchised 12 nuns who were trying to vote in the primary election. The nuns were all over 80 years old, all had a history of voting in past elections, and none of them drove. Their limited mobility made it difficult for them to get an ID.⁵

In Georgia, the League of Women Voters and the AARP estimated that 152,644 individuals over the age of 60 who voted in the 2004 election do not have a driver’s license and are unlikely to have other photo identification. Once turned away, few people return to the polls a second time. Also in Georgia, Census data showed that 17% of African-Americans households do not have access to an automobile, and therefore are less likely to have a drivers license, compared with 4% of White households. Photo ID requirements will result in tens of thousands of voters being denied the right to vote every election day. People with disabilities similarly are far less likely to have photo IDs.

Eligible voters will be turned away

One voter who was turned away for lack of his registration card was South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford. On election day in 2006, he left his card in the capital in Columbia when he tried to vote at his precinct on the coast. He was turned away by conscientious election workers in the time-honored tradition for politicians of having the media present. Unlike many, he was able to take several hours and retrieve his card and cast his vote.

This committee and the Maryland General Assembly have demonstrated a commitment to expanding the franchise and encouraging more voter engagement. This bill is out of keeping with that spirit and commitment. The committee has rightly rejected it in the past.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges an unfavorable report on SB 268.

⁴ See Study: 500,000 Americans Could Face Significant Challenges to Obtain Photo ID to Vote, Brennan Center for Justice, July 18, 2012.

⁵ Nuns with dated ID turned away at Ind. polls, May 6, 2008, at http://www.nbcnews.com/id/24490932/ns/politics-decision_08/t/nuns-dated-id-turned-away-ind-polls/#.URMbfIVSZ18.