

Virginia voter ID law enacted in effort to prevent voter fraud by Katharine Spencer

Due to new voting ID laws enacted in Virginia on July 1, voters across the Commonwealth will now have to present photo identification if they want to see the inside of a voting booth.

The law was enacted in an effort to prevent voter fraud by making voters bring a valid photo ID with them as proof of identity. Some forms of accepted identification include Virginia drivers licenses, military IDs, federal, state or local government issued IDs, a U.S. passport or a student ID from an institution of higher education based in the Commonwealth of Virginia. If a voter does not have one of these forms of identification, they can receive a temporary photo ID free of charge for voting purposes only from their voting locality. However, a valid photo ID must then be shown to the locality's Electoral Board by no later than the Friday after that election.

Before the change, Virginia's ID law merely stated that any identification, with or without a photo, was valid. Under the former law, things such as utility bills and pieces of mail with an address or signature were considered valid.

The new law has caused some controversy due to its restrictive nature. According to some, including Tram Nguyen, co-executive director of Virginia New Majority, the law restricts access to voting by making it more difficult and confusing. It would most impact minority voters, such as people of color, senior citizens and students. These groups are less likely to have photo IDs that meet the new requirements.

Stephen Farnsworth, professor of political science and international affairs and the director of the Center for Leadership and Media Studies at the University of Mary Washington, finds the new law to be a step back from previous identification guidelines.

“By tightening up these rules, the state officials are making it harder for Virginians who don’t have drivers licenses or who have just moved to cast a ballot,” Farnsworth said. “Given how poor turnout is in most elections, I sometimes wish elected officials would be thinking about ways to make voting easier rather than harder.”

According to Farnsworth, a national voter system would work better since differing voter ID laws between states creates a disconnect with citizens.

“I think what we really need is a national voter system where we have national voter identification. The different rules in different states create very different electorates in different places,” Farnsworth said.

UMW Young Democrats president Benjamin Hermerding finds this new law to be especially hurtful to the Democratic vote.

“Frankly, I find the new voter ID restrictions onerous and unnecessary... these laws make it more difficult for students and low-income Virginians to vote, a problem that particularly affects people of color. Consequentially, decreasing turnout in these populations disproportionately hurts Democrats,” Hermerding said.

There are some who believe the law is justified, however. College Republicans chairman Nicole Tardif thinks the law will be helpful in cutting down voter fraud.

“You need a photo ID to fly, pick up mail, etcetera. It makes sense that you’re required to show ID to vote,” Tardif said. “I don’t believe that there will be negative repercussions for any

particular group by requiring identification. You need an ID to do borderline anything, it will have minimal to no impact on getting people out to vote.”

Some UMW students also agreed with Tardif. Junior English major Evelyn Baumgardner said she thinks the new law does some good.

“I think that’s fair,” Baumgardner said. “It helps create a system that confirms the identity of the person voting [and] it helps to prevent anyone voting under a false name. It may be more of a hassle, but it helps make the system more secure.”

Last year, in an effort to promote voting amongst the UMW student body, the TurboVote program came to campus free of charge with the hopes of facilitating easier voting. Sponsored by the UMW Legislative Action Committee and the UMW Student Government, TurboVote helped students by sending voter registration and absentee forms to students through the mail, and also sent out election reminders via text messages and email.

This year, according to Tardif, TurboVote is back on campus with the help of Virginia21, who sponsors the program.

Hermerding also assured that there will be the annual Voter Registration BBQ sponsored by The Young Democrats, College Republicans and No Labels club this year. The annual event is intended to get the word out to students about voting and register as many students as possible. The date has yet to be decided.

Weblink: <http://blueandgraypress.com/2014/09/17/virginia-voter-id-law-enacted-in-effort-to-prevent-voter-fraud/>