



*Testimony in opposition to  
Multiple bills requiring voters to supply identification prior to voting  
Submitted to the Joint Committee on Election Laws  
By Linda Freedman, LWVMA Specialist on Elections and Voting  
January 19, 2016*

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges you to oppose S.378, H.557, H.569 and H.595, all requiring some form of photo identification at the polls.

These bills would expand voter identification requirements and make it more difficult to vote. The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy, and voting should be as easy and accessible as possible. Expansion of voter identification requirements beyond what is mandated by the Help America Vote Act can suppress voter turnout, be burdensome to voters and election officials, and create barriers – especially for voters who are elderly or disabled, members of a racial or ethnic minority, new citizens, and young voters. Requirements to show ID at the polls have a chilling effect on voter participation.

Under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), states must, among other things, require all voters to provide their driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number when registering to vote. HAVA also requires first-time voters who registered by mail to produce identification before voting. The League believes these requirements are adequate to prevent voter impersonation. Massachusetts does not need to add costly and time-consuming voter ID regulations that would disenfranchise voters as proposed in these bills.

### **Highlights**

- Voter disenfranchisement and low voter turnout are much greater problems than voting fraud.
- Requiring identification at the polling place would result in many eligible voters being turned away. Many poor and minority voters do not carry identification, and would be turned away in error. These voters, especially new citizens who may be concerned about government intrusion, are also more likely to be intimidated by such requirements.
- Implementing photo ID to vote is an unnecessary expense. One study found that implementing the voter photo ID law in Indiana exceeds \$10 million over four years. The costs for a proposed photo ID law in Missouri were put at \$6 million the first year and \$4 million each year for the second and third years. Massachusetts has better uses for that money.
- In November 2001, a federal court outlawed an identification requirement at the polls in Lawrence, MA. Both the U.S. Department of Justice and private plaintiffs

argued, and the court found, that “the burden imposed by this requirement will fall disproportionately on the Latin American community...”

- ID requirements can affect those who do not drive to their polling place and thus do not bring identification with them to the polls.
- In comprehensive studies of voter fraud by Demos (a think tank researching democracy) and by Cal Tech Professor Michael Alvarez, researchers concluded that in-person election fraud in the past decade has been extremely rare. Most reported instances of in-person voter impersonation fraud were found to be baseless.
- HAVA's requirements for identification at the time of registration and for first-time voters who register by mail are adequate to prevent fraud.
- Many Americans live with roommates, spouses, or relatives, or live on a college campus, where their name is not on the lease or on utility bills so they do not have these items as forms of identification at the polls.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges the Joint Committee on Election Laws to reject all of the voter ID bills. They place additional burdens on citizens and election officers.