

Ohio photo voter ID A picture worth \$7 million a year?

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The United States was founded on the ideal of government by consent of the governed. Voting is the means by which we express and achieve that consent. Throughout US history we have expanded the right to vote – to non-propertied men, African Americans and other people of color, women, and young adults. Recently in Ohio and other states, lawmakers are going in the opposite direction, proposing new restrictions.

A bill requiring photo identification to vote, HB 159, was approved by the Ohio House of Representatives in March 2011 and a Senate version has been introduced. Legislators have passed laws requiring photo voter ID in 17 states, nine of which are strict laws like the Ohio proposal.

The version of this bill passed by the Ohio House requires all voters to have photo identification, but provides free ID cards only to qualifying low-income voters who request the card and can prove low income. The Senate version would provide free cards more broadly. It is unclear whether either version would withstand a legal challenge. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a corporate-backed lobbying group that promoted voter ID laws, has announced it would disband its task force on safety and elections after the “Stand Your Ground” law that the group promoted became associated with the Florida shooting of unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin.

In Ohio, we estimate that approximately 938,642 Ohio adults lack photo IDs.

Costs

We have two different cost scenarios for the IDs and two different projections of how many cards would be needed. We can assume an \$8.50 cost – the current cost of a state ID in Ohio – in which case we need to include other costs not covered by the \$8.50. At this price, providing the IDs would cost a total of \$7.98 million. The state would also face a cost of \$3.47 million to supply some voters with birth certificates and a \$3.96 million cost for voter outreach. Finally the state would lose \$11.6 million in revenue that we currently get from the 341,146 citizens who now buy state IDs. Over a four-year period, the total cost would be \$27 million if we assume that all voters are provided one, and \$19.4 million if we assume that only 67 percent of voters (the turnout in the last presidential election) request one. The annual cost would range between \$4.85 and \$6.75 million.

| Estimated annual cost to Ohio for voter IDs Low and high estimates | | |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| Annual Cost | \$8.50 per ID | \$13.00 per ID |
| For all voters | \$6,750,945 | \$6,940,327 |
| For likely voters | \$4,849,833 | \$4,976,719 |

Source: Policy Matters Ohio, based on data from the US Census and Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

Alternately, we can assume a \$13.00 cost, the actual cost that Indiana faced when it implemented voter ID requirements. In this case, providing free ID cards would cost \$12.2 million. We would not incur costs for birth certificates, as those costs are built into the \$13.00. The state would still face the \$3.96 million cost for voter outreach and the \$11.6 million decline in revenue from reduced purchase of state IDs for a total cost of \$27.76 million for all voters or \$19.9 million for 67 percent of voters, over a four-year period. The annual cost would range between \$4.98 and \$6.94 million.

Comparable expenditures

Ohio is cutting spending on many essentials. House Bill 487, the mid-budget review, proposes cuts of \$92 million from the 2013 budget, including cuts to education, police and fire protection, drug treatment, disability services, and disease prevention. The state has even cut local election board funding, making it more difficult to staff elections and forcing reductions in polling places. HB 159 would inject a new unfunded mandate in this environment.

The \$6.94 million in annual costs could instead be used for other important priorities in Ohio. What other services of benefit to Ohio families could the state instead purchase for this amount?

- More than 8.68 million rides on mass transit for passengers who are elderly or have disabilities;
- More than 277,000 library items, including books, reference books and movies;
- More than 4,300 courses of treatment for patients with addiction; or
- More than 1,800 subsidized after-school child care slots for children in struggling families.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, the courts require that state photo ID laws meet criteria currently missing from HB 159. States must provide free IDs to all those who lack them, provide free birth certificates, expand the number and hours of ID-issuing offices, and undertake substantial voter outreach to ensure voters know the requirements. These requirements figure into our cost estimates.

Disparate impact

More than one in 10 Ohioans lacks a photo ID. The new requirements would have a disproportionate impact on elderly voters, young adults, minority voters and low-income voters, all of whom are statistically less likely to have an Ohio driver's license. Who lacks photo IDs?

- About 290,000 Ohio seniors – 18 percent;
- About 260,000 black Ohioans – a staggering one in four;
- At least 380,000 moderate-income Ohioans (earning less than \$35,000) – 15 percent of those in this income range;
- College students and voters without cars are also less likely to have valid photo IDs.

Conclusion

HB 159 is likely to suppress voting in Ohio. The bill purports to solve the virtually non-existent problem of voter impersonation, but will instead create new voting problems, and at a new cost. Ohioans value the right to vote and they value their neighbors' participation. If there is a problem with voting in Ohio, it is that existing barriers keep too many from exercising this basic right. Creating new, unnecessary costs and suppressing votes has no place in the Buckeye State.