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Study finds costs for photo voter ID bill Ohio proposal would cost \$5 - \$7 million annually, suppress votes

An Ohio bill requiring voters to present photo identification would cost up to \$7 million a year while suppressing votes, despite little evidence of voter impersonation, according to a new study from Policy Matters Ohio. House Bill 159, approved by the Ohio House of Representatives last year and under consideration in the Senate, would make voting more difficult for the nearly one million Ohio citizens who currently lack photo ID cards.

In most of the US, citizens can vote by presenting an identifying document, providing a signature, or showing simple proof of address; current Ohio law requires proof of identity, but not a photo ID.

The bill under consideration in Ohio is modeled after legislation recently passed in 17 states and promoted by the [American Legislative Exchange Council \(ALEC\)](#), a corporate-backed lobbying group that advocates for conservative social and economic proposals. Last week [ALEC announced](#) that it was disbanding its task force on voting and safety after its “Stand Your Ground” law became associated with the Florida shooting of unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin.

The purported target of this bill, voter impersonation, is practically non-existent in Ohio. In fact, voter impersonation is rarer than deaths by lightning strike, according to a report by the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. The proposed Ohio law would take much-needed funds away from things like education and health care in order to solve a problem that essentially does not exist.

“This bill is a non-solution in search of a problem. At a time when we are cutting other essentials, it would spend millions of dollars to suppress votes,” said Amy Hanauer, Policy Matters executive director and a report co-author.

The report, *Ohio photo voter ID: A picture worth \$7 million a year?*, examines the actual costs of a similar law in Indiana and current costs in Ohio to determine a range of possible costs that the state of Ohio would face if it began requiring photo ID cards to vote. Expenses include the cost of photo cards, producing documents needed to obtain a card, voter outreach and lost revenue from those who would no longer buy state IDs because the state now has to provide them for free.

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

Comparable expenditures

What could \$6.94 million buy each year in Ohio?

- More than 8,680,000 mass transit rides for passengers who are elderly or have disabilities
- More than 277,000 books or other library items.
- More than 4,000 courses of out-patient treatment for patients with alcohol addiction.
- A year of after-school childcare for more than 1,800 children in low-income families.

Assuming the lower \$8.50 per-ID cost (the current cost of a state ID in Ohio), the total cost would be \$6.75 million per year if all voters without IDs were provided one, and \$4.85 million per year if only 67 percent of voters (the turnout in the last presidential election) were to request one. Assuming a \$13 cost per ID – the actual cost the state of Indiana incurred for a similar program – Policy Matters found an annual cost of \$6.94 million for all voters or \$4.98 million for 67 percent of voters.

This expensive and unnecessary bill comes at a time when Ohio is cutting spending on many essentials. The April 2012 mid-budget review proposes cuts of \$92 million from the Fiscal Year 2013 budget, with less spending on schools, police and fire protection, drug treatment, disability services, and disease prevention, among other services.

The state has even cut local election board funding, making it more difficult to staff elections and forcing some local

elections boards to reduce the number of polling places. The ID proposal would inject a new unfunded mandate at a time of shrinking budgets.

The \$6.9 million in annual costs could instead be used to pay for nearly 9 million mass transit rides for passengers who are elderly or have disabilities, more than 277,000 books or movies in our public libraries, drug and alcohol treatment for more than 4,000 patients, or a year’s worth of after-school care for more than 1,800 children, to cite just a few examples.

Courts have required that state photo ID laws meet certain criteria currently missing from HB 159, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. States must provide free IDs to all those who lack them (not just those who are low-income), issue free birth certificates if they are needed to obtain IDs (as in Ohio), expand the number and hours of ID-issuing offices, and undertake substantial voter outreach to ensure voters know the requirements. These requirements figure into the cost of the bill.

More than one in ten Ohio citizens lacks a photo ID. The new requirements would have a disproportionate impact on elderly voters, young adults, minority voters and low-income voters, since they are statistically less likely to have an Ohio driver’s license. Some 18 percent of Ohio seniors (about 290,000) lack photo IDs, as do a staggering one in four African-American Ohioans (about 260,000) and at least 380,000 moderate-income Ohioans (those earning less than \$35,000 a year). College students and voters without cars are also less likely to have valid photo IDs.

“If there is a problem with voting in Ohio, it is that existing barriers keep too many people from exercising this basic right,” Hanauer said. “Creating new, unnecessary costs and suppressing votes has no place in the Buckeye State.”