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## Critics call for delay in enforcing voter IDs

- The Secretary of State's Office says nearly 700,000 Georgians lack a valid driver's license or state-issued ID to vote.

*Dave Williams*

**ATLANTA** — Civil-rights and good-government advocates asked the State Election Board Monday to delay enforcement of Georgia's voter ID law until after next month's primaries.

Those critics of the law requiring voters to show a photo identification at the polls spoke out even as the Secretary of State's Office reported that nearly 700,000 Georgians don't have a valid driver's license or state-issued ID, the most commonly forms of identification likely to be used to comply with the new law.

"There is no practical way that this ... system can manage this huge group of voters," said board member David Worley, a former state Democratic chairman who represents the party on the board. "There is a huge train wreck that's going to happen this July and November."

The Republican-controlled General Assembly first adopted a photo ID requirement for Georgia voters last year, over objections from Democrats that the legislation was intended as a barrier to elderly and black voters, two groups that tend to support Democratic candidates.

But the law was overturned by a federal judge who cited the costs of the IDs and the difficulty of getting them as impediments to the right to vote.

The Legislature came back this year and passed a new version of the bill making the IDs free and requiring all 159 Georgia counties to make them available at local elections offices.

The elections board voted 3-1 on Monday, with Worley dissenting, to adopt the rules that will govern the new law, including a lengthy list of documents that voters needing photo IDs can present to obtain one.

But Worley and others argued it would be unfair for the state to enforce the photo ID requirement during the July 18 primaries because there isn't enough time to prepare the voters.

Kathy Rogers, director of the secretary of state's Elections Division, said a mailing the agency is developing with information on the new law won't be ready in time for the primaries. She said that even if the material could be made available, she's reluctant to send it to voters who may not be able to obtain a voter ID in their home counties before July 18.

Another hurdle is that the U.S. Justice Department hasn't approved the new law, and there's no clear timetable for when the federal agency will act.

Under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Georgia and other states with a history of discriminating against minority voters must submit changes in their election laws to the federal government.

Beyond concerns over whether the state is ready to enforce the new law, opponents Monday repeated the arguments against the photo ID that were heard during the past two legislative sessions.

Joe Beasley, Southern regional director for the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, compared the requirement to the poll tax and grandfather clause, laws that kept Southern blacks from voting during the Jim Crow era.

"What you're doing here is an embarrassment," he said. "It is a failed idea."

"You're disenfranchising hundreds of thousands of people," said Jennifer Owens of the League of Women Voters of Georgia.

But Randy Evans, who represents the Georgia Republican Party on the elections board, said GOP legislative leaders worked hard to make sure the new law allows voters who don't have valid photo IDs to get them as easily as possible.

Even voters who show up on Election Day without an ID can get one at the polls, he said.

"Under these new rules, we create one-stop shopping," he said. "There is no second trip."