



EQUAL TIME

## **Voter ID law too flawed for repair**

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When Georgia adopted the most restrictive voter identification law in the country, many critics — among them citizen advocacy groups such as the League of Women Voters, AARP and Common Cause, and even lawyers in the Justice Department — raised concerns about the constitutionality of the requirements.

Preliminary rulings in the lawsuit that ensued indicate several federal judges share our concerns. In light of those rulings, supporters of the photo identification requirements are proposing changes in hopes of saving the law.

Those proposals center on making the photo identification cards free, thereby circumventing the poll tax argument, and more accessible, thereby getting around the problems associated with requiring voters in 159 counties to travel to only 56 locations, statewide, to obtain the necessary ID. While the actual particulars of the proposed changes have not been announced, it is clear that these solutions would be costly and difficult to implement in time for the 2006 general election. Further, the cost to either the individual voters or to taxpayers has yet to be justified by one single example of a voter impersonating another at the polls, the only kind of fraud that this law addresses.

The requirement that otherwise eligible voters must now produce one of only seven forms of identification, all with a photo, is not contained in the Georgia Constitution. The requirement sets up barriers of cost, both in fees and in time off work and travel expense, to thousands of Georgia voters. On the other hand, the Legislature made voting by absentee ballot, without any form of identification, easier, despite the fact that there are many recent, reported instances of voter fraud involving absentee ballots.

Voters in Georgia must ask their representatives, "Is it so imperative to spend time and resources honing this law that is a solution for which there is no problem?" Or, should we focus on the real problems in our election system, such as increasing the number and training of poll workers and the funding for elections? Democracy works best when more, rather than fewer, voices are heard. Encouraging robust voter turnout should be the goal of all Georgians, including those elected to represent us.

- Elisabeth MacNamara is president of the League of Women Voters of Georgia.