

OPPOSITION TO S-400, THE VOTER ID BILL

*** Voter ID requirements have a disproportionate and unfair impact on low-income, racial and ethnic minority voters, senior citizens and voters with disabilities.** For example, the 2001 Commission on Federal Election Reform estimated that 6 to 10 percent of voting-age Americans do not have a driver's license or state-issued photo ID, and that those who lack photo ID are disproportionately poor and urban. More recently and closer to home, a 2008 Brown University study concluded: "Voter ID is one of many factors that influence civic participation in the United States, and its overall impact is negative." The report found that "the suppressive effect of voter ID disproportionately affected not only minorities, but also persons with less than a high school education and less than \$15,000 income, tenants, and recent movers."

*** Voter ID requirements can amount to a poll tax.** Although the legislation provides that residents without photo ID could obtain a voter identification card for free, it is virtually certain that the identification a voter would need to prove one's identity in the first place in order to obtain the card would *not* be free. That is, even if the IDs themselves are "free," the birth certificates, passports, or other documents that would be required to qualify for the ID are not. There is an added burden in that the people least likely to have photo ID in the first place are also less likely to be able to easily access the back-up documents that prove their identity.

*** Photo ID is a potential tool for discrimination.** A comprehensive study of all the states in the last Super Tuesday Primary showed that African-Americans were 14% more likely to be asked for photo identification. That occurred across states with optional and mandatory identification requirements.

*** The bill amounts to a solution in search of a problem.** While proponents argue that it is necessary in order to combat voter impersonation fraud, the voter misconduct that occurs in that way is negligible. In fact, over the years, the most consistent cries of voting misconduct in Rhode Island have arisen in the context of absentee ballots, something that would not in any way be addressed by a polling place ID requirement. In addition, the only relatively recent criminal charges of voting fraud stemmed from elections in East Providence where people were indicted for *registering and voting from a business address*. Again, a voter ID requirement would have done nothing to eliminate this fraud. In any event, if a person is willing to face felony penalties by falsely and publicly proclaiming before witnesses at a polling place that they are somebody else, it is just as easy for them to more quietly obtain and present fraudulent identification.

*** There are significant costs associated with implementing a photo ID law to comport with constitutional standards.**

It is for all these reasons that **this bill is opposed by a wide variety of organizations in the state**, including the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, the RI Commission for Human Rights, Common Cause RI, AARP Rhode Island, the RI Disability Law Center, and many others. The right to vote is the most important civil right of all. The General Assembly should be in the business of encouraging full participation of our citizenry, not developing ways to limit the right to vote.