

Testimony before the Kansas House Committee on
Elections

February 6, 2012

I am Marge Ahrens, President of the League of Women Voters of Topeka-Shawnee County and today representing the Kansas League of Women Voters. The League has helped persons gain and keep the right to vote for 92 years. We are non-partisan. In Kansas we have helped hundreds of thousands of people register to vote.

We use every opportunity to educate citizens about the importance of their vote, about candidates and about issues of common concern. Today I want to report what we do know about the new Kansas government issued ID program as it relates to the focus on bringing forward the date of implementation of the new Kansas voter registration requirements.

The Pew Institute estimates that 300,000 Kansans are or will be negatively affected by the new voter laws. The required citizen government issued ID program for all voters which went into effect in January, 2012 was skeletal and defective while "citizen education" was almost non-existent.

A week after the first election under the new law in Cimarron the Kansas Bureau of Vital Statistics did not realize it was to have issued free birth certificates to anyone wanting to get a free government issued ID in order to vote. Workers at the Department of Motor Vehicles, while requiring a birth certificate in order to get a government issued ID (either drivers license or non-driver ID) in some offices did not realize that they were to issue free government ID's to non-drivers so that they might vote. As of January 30th, election officials had not been trained in the new law.

Because there was no real investigation done, we do not know how many citizens just stayed at home or drove away when they saw the sign warning them at the polling station that they needed government issued photo ID in order to vote.

This leads us to the complex issue of implementation of the new voter registration law. How exactly will the law

impact the 11% of our citizens who do not drive, do not have transportation or time off to get a government issued photo id, are homebound, handicapped and/or elderly and all those who cannot work through complexities with ease.

Many were born in other states which now require payment and even a photo ID to get a birth certificate. They are probably not the privileged in our state where the differences between incomes is spread wide. The affidavit, to get an exception in Kansas is an unclear and very cumbersome process. The law is heavy handed and burdensome for those short on personal and material resources.

We believe that election officials have not had to go through background checks and training to certify that our personal documents will be safe when submitted to the local election offices. Prior to the new "Safe" Act only the last four of a social security number and/or drivers license number was required for a voter registration. It worked. In just five years Kansans cast over 10 million ballots; in that time there were only six allegations of voter fraud and ONE of those was a true fraud case—a US white male citizen who voted in Kansas and Missouri both. This law does not touch double voting fraud; it only addresses someone impersonating a voter. There has been no documented instance of in-person voter impersonation fraud in Kansas. Will voters who are allowed to cast provisional ballots know that if they do not (or cannot) go to the election office within days of the election that their ballots are void? We think not.

Finally, the new law is not "free". For instance, Vital Statistics and Department of Motor Vehicles now has the financial burden of providing free documents and services.

Election offices will have to provide free photo copies of documents to those walking in to register to vote, and serve directly all those for whom others had earlier carried the application. Perhaps most importantly, citizens will bear the costs of time off work, transportation, mailings and studying to meet the new standards. Elderly and disabled will require the help of many others.

Among the one million Kansas women whose birth

certificate does not match their married names are those who now must get the so-called free photo ID. They must pay \$15 for a copy of their marriage license from Kansas and perhaps more if from another state. And they will need to pay for that marriage license and (and an out of state birth certificate) in order to register under the 2013 portion of the law. Is this not a poll tax? How will this be solved by June?

The Federal money "leveraged" for "education" at high end grocery stores and in utility flyers, is taken from the Help America Vote Act grant. It might better be used for Kansas counties that do not have voter verifiable, voting machines with paper trails so that votes can re-counted.

There is no hands-on help planned for the citizens with limited resources in our state who move at the rate of 14% a year. They may never see the ads in stores or in a landlord's utility bill to know to re-register to vote with all this new rigmarole when they move. They will not be sending in their documents with a photo from their cell phones. They will not be checking on line and struggling to understand the rules on a website. The so-called "Safe" act may indeed be quite unsafe and makes voter registration out of reach for 11% of our population who currently do not have government issued ID.

The League doubts the anticipated 150,000 new voter registrants expected in the six months before the upcoming national elections not come near that number if the new voter registration law is in effect, because the law makes it too difficult.

The League of Women voters is very concerned with what has seemed a flippant manner by which some would complicate voting and voter registration, the most basic right of representative government, the great equalizer, in spite of the lack of evidence of especially immigrant voter impersonation fraud. The right to vote in this Free State is not maintained by an intellectual game played to determine who has a more privileged right to vote, or by what kind of restrictions are able to squeak through courts, by how far one can go to test the U.S. Constitution. Kansas citizens do not merit an undue burden when they vote.

Whenever the new voter registration law is put into effect, the League of Women Voters of Kansas along with many other groups who have historically helped register voters will be reluctant and perhaps unable to continue our long tradition of setting up voter registration drives for new voters. We cannot and should not copy personal identification documents. Potential voters will be greatly inconvenienced or even blocked by the need to go through two steps, one to get the government issued ID and another to go to the county election office to register.

We strongly oppose the needless and burdensome laws which defy the spirit of representative government which seeks inclusiveness of ALL citizens in the voting process. We believe that the undue costs and burdens to voters wanting to register is a poll tax in spirit and in fact.

Nationally, when women got the vote, the first local and state chapters of League of Women Voters were right here in Kansas. We will be very sad to have to end our very long tradition of helping register citizens to vote in Kansas.

Finally, I want to remind you that one does not need a proof of citizenship or government issued photo ID to register to run for office in Kansas.