

Voter ID law puts seniors at a specific disadvantage



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The new Texas Voter ID law requires that, before you can vote, you must show a current photo ID. That sounds harmless to most people who, as a matter of routine, have a driver's license. No big deal, right? Wrong. Under the new law, even people with a valid driver's license can face extra hurdles at the polling place.

Situation 1: You have a photo ID that says your name is "Sue Smith" but your name on the voter registration list is "Susan Smith". Or your name is misspelled (for instance, on the driver's license it is spelled "Alan" but on the voter roll it is spelled "Allan"). If that happens then, when you appear to vote and the two names do not exactly match, you will be taken aside. You will be required to sign an affidavit declaring that you are the same person despite the name discrepancy, and then you will proceed to vote.

To avoid this complication and comply with Texas law, you should check your existing photo ID against your existing voter registration card. If you find an inconsistency in the names, you can change your

voter registration to match your photo ID. If you have not moved to another county, you can change your voter registration online at the Secretary of State's Voter Registration Name/Address Change website (<https://txapps.texas.gov/tolapps/SOSACManager>).

Situation 2: You arrive at your polling place and realize you forgot to bring your photo ID. Either you go home to get it, or your vote is considered "provisional" until you travel downtown within the next six days to present the photo ID. Any voter who cannot present a photo ID can still cast a provisional vote which is counted only if legal ID is provided in person at the Election Office within the next six days. That is inconvenient at best, and at worst will result in your vote being discarded.

Situation 3: You do not have a valid Texas driver's license. For example, you just turned 80, have decided to stop driving, and your driver's license has expired. Seniors are at a specific disadvantage under the voter ID law, because many no longer have a valid driver's license. The legal system is designed to make it more difficult for seniors (79 or older) to renew a driver's license. To be acceptable, all IDs must be current or expired no more than 60 days. No currently valid photo ID means a provisional vote with a trip to the Election Office within the next six days.

If you have no driver's license,

the law provides alternatives.

First, the law allows you to present other forms of photo ID. The only types which are legally allowed are 1) a Texas personal identification card issued by DPS; 2) a Texas concealed handgun license; 3) a U.S. military ID card containing your photo; 4) a U.S. citizenship certificate containing your photo; 5) a U.S. passport; or 6) a special Texas Election Identification Certificate (EIC) issued by the DPS. (Obtaining the new EIC from the Texas DPS requires you to stand in line at a driver license office to complete an EIC application and present legal documentation proving you are a U.S. citizen and proving your identity.)

Second, the law allows you to claim an exemption from the ID law. There are three exemptions: 1) You may claim a religious objection to having your photo taken. 2) You may have no ID due to a natural disaster (as declared by the president or the governor). With these first two exemptions you may cast a provisional ballot, then travel to the Election Office within 6 days to sign an affidavit claiming the exemption. If you do

not appear, your vote is discarded. 3) If you are disabled under Social Security law or have a VA disability of at least 50 percent, and have no photo ID, you can vote by presenting your voter registration card and written proof of the disability issued by Social Security or by the VA.

Why have these changes to voting procedures been imposed? The governor would likely say it is to prevent voter fraud. Opponents would likely say that it is an attempt to make voting more complex thereby discouraging certain citizen groups from voting. In fact, the Texas Voter ID law was found to be discriminatory by the federal Department of Justice. However, the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that the standards under which that finding was made were outdated.

The Supreme Court challenged Congress to amend the law, but Congress has not yet acted to fix the law (as of July 15). The governor and attorney general of Texas did act, quickly declaring that the Texas Voter ID law will be enforced immediately.

Submit questions by clicking "submit a question" at www.premack.com.

Our next election is on November 5. Be sure you act soon to affirm you have an approved photo ID. Confirm that the photo ID matches your voter registration.

If you fail to prepare, voting can become such a burden that you may decide not to vote. Don't sacrifice your right to vote – celebrate your right to vote! Prepare now to avoid trouble.