

# Defend the right to vote! Down with photo ID laws!

Statement by Phyllis Scherrer, SEP candidate for vice president

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The Socialist Equality Party condemns the efforts to use restrictive voter ID laws to inhibit voting, and the collaboration of the Obama administration and the federal courts with this anti-democratic campaign.

Ten states have adopted the most restrictive form of voter ID law, the one most clearly drafted for the purpose of reducing the number of votes. Spearheaded by Republicans, these laws require voters to show a state-issued photo ID card when they go to the polls. The ID cards must have an expiration date, a provision added for the sole purpose of imposing an additional hurdle for those who have greater difficulty getting and renewing the card, including the elderly and those without cars or unable to drive.

In my home state of Pennsylvania, the state government estimates that 758,000 registered voters lack ID cards and could be denied the right to vote in November. State officials claimed that less than one percent of the population lacked the necessary ID, but now admit that the figure is more than nine percent, and rises to 18 percent in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, the two largest cities and the largest concentrations of the minority and working class voters.

There are no doubt immediate political calculations, involving the internecine conflicts between the Democrats and Republicans, that are motivating these laws. After the Pennsylvania law was passed, the Republican leader of the state assembly, Mike Turzai, told a meeting of the Republican State Committee that the law “is gonna allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania,” a clear declaration of the political motivation for passage of the bill.

However, there are more fundamental factors at work. The institution of voter ID laws is part of an attack on

what little remains of democratic rights in the United States, an attack that is supported by both big business parties.

This week the Brennan Center of Justice at the New York University School of Law issued a report on the voter ID laws in the ten most restrictive states, which found a flagrantly discriminatory impact on poor and minority voters, particularly in rural areas of the South. Methods that were outlawed by the 1965 Voting Rights Act are now being revived.

The discriminatory impact of the new laws is clear, impacting poor people the most. This finds reflection in a disproportionate impact on racial minorities. While 11 percent of the population lacks the required ID, that figure rises to 16 percent of Hispanics and 25 percent of African Americans. Among those over age 65 of all races, 18 percent lack a state-issued ID of the kind required to vote.

More than 1 million voters in the ten states—Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin—fall below the federal poverty line and live at least 10 miles away from an ID office.

Those without photo IDs lack drivers licenses and therefore can't drive themselves to the voter ID office. They must depend on others or on public transportation, which has been drastically cut back, particularly in rural areas and in the South.

The Brennan Center report focused on the difficulty and expense of obtaining a photo ID. While the US Supreme Court, in a reactionary decision, upheld the state of Indiana's voter ID law, state governments have been required to provide the ID for free, because a charge would constitute an unconstitutional poll tax.

State governments have deliberately evaded this requirement by imposing secondary fees and charges.

For example, voters who lack documents required to get the voter ID, such as a birth certificate or marriage license (required for women who vote under their married name), can be charged for those documents rather than for the voter ID itself. These documents can cost \$16 to \$45, according to the Brennan Center: “By comparison, the notorious poll tax — outlawed during the civil rights era — cost \$10.64 in current dollars.”

Even voters willing to pay such fees find it difficult to get to voter ID offices, particularly in rural areas. The report gives the example of a voter ID office in Sauk City, Wisconsin, which is open only on the fifth Wednesday of the month. Since only four months of the year even have a fifth Wednesday, the office is open only four days a year.

The Brennan Center report demonstrates a blatant pattern of racial discrimination in the way that many of the states operate and locate offices for issuing the IDs that are now required for voting.

Overall, some ten million voters could lose their right to vote because of the application of these reactionary laws.

The most recent decision of the Obama administration, giving the state of Florida access to the Department of Homeland Security database to conduct a politically motivated purge of Hispanic and other immigrant voters, amounts to direct collaboration in voter suppression.

It demonstrates what the Socialist Equality Party has long maintained, ever since the capitulation of the Democratic Party to the stolen presidential election of 2000: there exists no significant constituency for the defense of democratic rights in any section of the bourgeois ruling elite.

The most basic democratic forms—including the right to vote—are incompatible with the determination of the corporate and financial elite to pursue the most ruthless assault on the working class at home and the expansion of unpopular wars abroad.

The defense of democratic rights is the task of the working class, and requires the building of a truly independent mass political movement of working people, fighting against the capitalist system and for a socialist program. This is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party fights in this election. For more

information, visit [www.socialequality.com](http://www.socialequality.com)



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