

ANALYSIS: VOTER PHOTO ID LAWS ARE COSTLY

NEW MEXICO COULD SPEND \$5.5 MILLION OVER THREE YEARS

February 2012

An analysis of studies from other states shows that the voter photo ID legislation currently under consideration by the New Mexico Legislature is unnecessary and would likely cost taxpayers more than \$1.8 million per year or \$5.5 million over the next three years. This added expenditure would be imposed just as the state is emerging from four years of deep budget cuts.

This analysis of the cost is drawn from studies by several other states. The annual cost of \$1.8 million is almost twice the amount estimated by the New Mexico Secretary of State's office in response to a similar bill last year.

New Mexico, with 1,473,000 residents of voting age, already has a voter ID requirement. A variety of forms of voter identification are allowable under current state law at registration. It is a felony to impersonate another voter to cast a ballot at the polls. Voter photo ID laws are deeply suspect given the tiny number of voter impersonation cases.

The voter ID bill that has been introduced in the current legislative session would require voters to produce a photo ID at the polls in order to cast their vote. As voter photo ID laws have the effect of posing unnecessary barriers to participation for many voters, they are most often looked at as attempts at voter suppression.

This notion is reinforced when one considers the groups likely to be most affected by photo ID laws. The Brennan Center for Justice has found that veterans, the elderly, and persons with disabilities are the groups most likely to be prohibited from voting because they have no photo ID. Voters in rural areas would also be especially affected. Native Americans, Hispanics and African Americans are less likely to have photo identification than whites. Voting is a civic duty and a constitutional right, and New Mexico voters should be encouraged to participate in elections—not discouraged by burdensome and unnecessary requirements.

The cost of implementing a voter photo ID law can be broken down into three categories: the cost of the



actual ID, the cost of voter education campaigns, and the administrative expenses.

COST OF PHOTO IDs

One of the problems with a voter photo ID act is that it can amount to a poll tax if the voter is expected to pay for an ID they would otherwise not require. Poll taxes—or making people pay for the right to vote—are a violation of civil rights laws. Studies show that between 7 and 11 percent of citizens don't have a photo ID. New Mexico residents can apply for a non-driver photo ID from the state's Motor Vehicle Division at a cost of \$10 or \$18, depending on how many years it is valid. Passports are another form of government-issued photo ID, but they are significantly more expensive and can take months to process.



Were a voter photo ID law implemented in New Mexico, the state should bear the cost of issuing the ID in order to avoid almost certain lawsuits. Whether the state pays for the IDs or not, demands on New Mexico's already overburdened MVD personnel and computer system will most certainly go up. New Mexico's cost would be \$883,000 over three years and

almost \$300,000 annually or 20 cents per voter. North Carolina estimated the cost at 20 cents per voter per year. Elsewhere, per-voter costs range from 3 cents in South Carolina to 28 cents in Missouri.

VOTER EDUCATION

Voter photo ID laws require aggressive publicity efforts to inform voters and ensure that they aren't turned away at the polls. New Mexico's cost would be \$1.2 million annually or 80 cents per voter. Over three years the cost would be \$3.535 million. In North Carolina the cost of publicity was estimated at 80 cents per registered voter. Elsewhere, per-voter costs range from 15 cents in Texas and \$1.37 in Missouri.

ADMINISTRATION

Voter photo ID laws add dozens of new administrative costs for state and local officials, from updating forms and websites to hiring and training staff to inspect photo IDs and handle the inevitable increase in provisional ballots on Election Day. New Mexico's cost to implement voter photo ID cards would be almost \$400,000 annually or 20 cents per voter per year. Over three years the cost would be \$1.1 million. North Carolina estimated this cost at 25 cents per voter and Minnesota estimated the cost at 15 cents per voter.

CONCLUSION

Adding the costs for providing ID cards, educating voters, and additional administrative and implementation costs results in an estimated total cost of \$1.8 million annually or \$5.5 million over three years in New Mexico. A voter photo ID law is a superfluous and expensive solution to a nonexistent problem. The state should be making exercising the constitutional right to vote easier, not more difficult.

Voter Photo ID Cost Estimates in Several States and New Mexico

Every place is different, but the experiences of other states offer clues to the likely cost of a voter photo ID bill for New Mexico taxpayers. The following projections come from fiscal notes or cost estimates prepared by the officials of each given state. A North Carolina analysis of fiscal notes for voter photo ID laws nationally found that most states neglected to report key expenses or stated that these costs could be “absorbed” by existing agencies—an unlikely scenario today, with budget cuts at all levels of government.

| State Expenses | Why it’s Needed | 3-Year Estimates, Other States | 3-Year and Annual Estimates, New Mexico |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Educating Voters | TV ads, mailings, other outreach to inform current and new voters; to avoid confusion and people being turned away at the polls | Missouri: \$16.8 million (\$1.37/ voter/year) Texas: \$6 million (15 cents/ voter/year) North Carolina: \$13-\$15.8 million (80 cents/voter/year) | 3-Year: \$3.5 million (80 cents/voter/year) Annual: \$1.2 million |
| Photo ID Cards | ID materials/equipment; increased demand at MVD offices; cost of issuing ID cards to avoid law becoming “poll tax” on those without ID | Missouri: \$3.4 million (28 cents/ voter/year) Wisconsin: \$2.3 million (22 cents/voter/year) North Carolina: \$2.5-\$4.7 million (20 cents/voter/year) | 3-Year: \$883,800 (20 cents/voter/year) Annual: \$294,600 |
| Administration/ Implementation | Hiring/training more precinct judges and poll staff to handle IDs and provisional ballots; printing provisional ballots; updating forms/ procedures and training staff; other expenses | Poll Staff: Montgomery Co., MD: \$285,000 (16 cents/voter/ year) Minnesota: \$1.4 million (15 cents/voter/year) Extra Ballots: South Carolina: \$480, 000 (2 cents/voter/year) Systems/Training: Wisconsin: \$138,000 (4 cents/ voter/year) | 3-Year: \$1.1 million (25 cents/voter/year) Annual: \$368,250 |

Total Three-Year Cost, New Mexico = \$5,523,750

Total Annual Cost, New Mexico = \$1,841,250

Source: Fiscal notes for Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin legislatures, and Institute for Southern Studies, February 2011 (www.southernstudies.org)

2340 Alamo Ave. SE, Suite 120 • Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106-3523 • 505.244.9505 • www.nmvoices.org

This report was made possible by a grant from Dēmos.

The Fiscal Policy Project, a program of New Mexico Voices for Children, is made possible by grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the McCune Charitable Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

This report is available for download and use with proper citation at www.nmvoices.org