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Pennsylvania Voter ID: It's Always Something The Color of Law By David A. Love, JD BC Executive Editor

A challenge to Pennsylvania's infamous new [voter ID law](#) is headed to the state Supreme Court. Unless the courts block the new law before November 6, all voters in the Keystone state will have to present an acceptable, state-approved photo ID when they go to the polls on Election Day.

For those Pennsylvanians who do not have the necessary identification, obtaining one has its challenges and hurdles.

Based on the state's own data, [758,000 Pennsylvanians](#) lack the proper identification - 9.2 percent of the state's voting population. In Philadelphia, 186,830 people - 18 percent of the city's voting population - don't have the ID.

According to the Pennsylvania [Department of Transportation \(PennDOT\)](#), to obtain a photo identification card, the person must go to a driver license center with a completed application and a social security card. The applicant also must either have a certificate of U.S. citizenship or naturalization, a U.S. passport or a birth certificate with a raised seal, and two proofs of residency such as a lease, mortgage, utility bill, W-2 or tax form. Once the application is processed, the person's photo is taken and the ID card is issued.

Those who have no such proof may bring their roommate as one proof of residency. Students at least 18 years old may supply a dorm room assignment, credit card bill, pay stub or bank statement as proof of residency. The homeless can use their shelter address, but must visit

the driver's license center accompanied by an employee of the shelter. That employee must have a shelter-issued photo identification card and a letter on shelter letterhead stating that the homeless person is staying at the shelter.

However, if the voter does not drive, does not have a birth certificate with a raised seal and was born *in* Pennsylvania, he or she can apply for a [special voter card](#).

Applicants must present their name, address, social security number and proof of residency, and complete and sign a form stating they are registered to vote but lack the required ID. The DMV office then verifies the applicant's birth with the Department of Health, and issues an ID for \$10. If the office cannot verify the applicant's birth, it will issue the non-driver ID if the Department of State verifies the applicant is registered to vote. This process takes up to 10 business days.

Civil rights and civil liberties groups criticize the voter ID application process for the barriers it presents for some voters, and its discriminatory impact on certain groups who are more likely to vote Democratic. They claim the voter ID requirement resembles the poll tax, literacy test and other tactics employed in the Jim Crow South to suppress and disenfranchise the black vote.

Meanwhile, conservative Republicans who support the voter ID law point to the need to protect the integrity of elections and combat voter fraud, although Gov. Tom Corbett's administration cannot identify a single case where someone voted by impersonating someone else. Further, Pennsylvania state Rep. [Mike Turzai](#) - the Republican leader in the Pennsylvania House - said the voter ID law will help Mitt Romney win the state on Election Day.

The [ACLU of Pennsylvania](#) - one of the organizations leading the challenge to the law in court - argues that an estimated 37 percent of Pennsylvania voters think there is no voter ID law or are unaware of it. Meanwhile, the vast majority of those who lack a valid ID card believe they have a valid form of ID. According to the ACLU, demographic groups such as women, Latinos, the elderly, the poor, and younger voters are less likely to possess an acceptable ID.

The law poses a catch-22 for voters who need an ID to get an ID. For [elderly African-American voters](#), who perhaps were born with the aid of midwives in the Jim Crow South and later moved to Pennsylvania, a

birth certificate never existed, was destroyed, or contained errors. A number of the Pennsylvanians who are challenging the law are elderly African Americans who live in Philadelphia, the largest city in the Keystone state.

[Gloria Cuttino](#), 61, lives in Philadelphia and was born in Summerville, South Carolina. For over a year, Ms. Cuttino has attempted to secure a birth certificate from South Carolina, but was told the state has no record of her birth. She would have to pay \$100 to search census records, and hire an attorney to petition the court for a delayed birth certificate.

Dorothy Barksdale, 86, was born with the aid of a midwife in rural Virginia. Virginia has no record of Ms. Barksdale's birth, and while she has voted in Pennsylvania for years and worked as a poll worker, her voting rights are in danger because she does not have a driver's license. Similarly, Grover Freeland, 72, has tried unsuccessfully to obtain his birth certificate from New York. He does not have a driver's license and has not driven in years, but the veterans card issued by the federal government is not acceptable under the Pennsylvania law.

[Viviette Applewhite](#), 93, the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit challenging the law, rode two buses to a DMV office to receive a temporary ID card, after years of being denied an ID. Applewhite's Social Security card was stolen a number of years ago, and since she was adopted at a young age, the name on her birth certificate does not match the name on other documents.

Another barrier facing many Pennsylvanians is distance.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, nearly 2.3 million voting age citizens in Pennsylvania - 24 percent of Pennsylvania voters - live 10 miles or more from the nearest government office issuing the ID.

In July, the Brennan Center issued a [report](#) highlighting the challenges facing hundreds of thousands of poor Americans in obtaining the proper voter identification. Pennsylvania is one of ten states with the most restrictive laws requiring citizens to produce a government issued ID in order to vote.

Further, of the 10 states highlighted in the study, Pennsylvania has the highest percentage of voting age people without access to a car - 10.4 percent, or 985,414 voters. Of those citizens without access to a

vehicle, 135,544 - 13.8 percent of all voters - live over 10 miles from a state ID center.

The 10 states cited by Brennan make up 127 of the 270 electoral votes needed to capture the presidency. With 20 electoral votes, Pennsylvania favors President Obama in most polls. Yet, if thousands of legitimate voters are unable to obtain a valid photo ID in time for the election, this could influence the race in Pennsylvania and the national election.

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