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Plenty of evidence

A couple of recent letters expressed doubts about the factual basis for the criticisms of the Voter ID bill, now pending in the General Assembly, that were raised by League of Women Voters president Barbara Zia (Post and Courier, May 15). In truth, there is plenty of evidence -- provided to our legislators by the S.C. Department of Motor Vehicles and The State Election Commission about the 178,000 registered voters in our state who will be disenfranchised if this legislation passes. In each of four counties alone (Marlboro, Allendale, Beaufort, and Jasper), over 10 percent of voters do not possess a driver's license. They may be students, low-income, disabled or elderly citizens, but they all have already passed South Carolina's tough identification requirements and have registered to vote.

The estimated costs include lost revenue from elimination of fees for DMV-supplied photo ID cards, additional training for poll workers, a statewide voter education program and new voter registration cards that include a photo. Again, these estimates come from the agencies that would be required -- at a time when we are furloughing teachers and cutting back on health benefits for our neediest residents -- to pro-actively provide photo IDs, train poll workers, and ramp up a voter education campaign to explain which IDs would pass muster.

As one who attended last week's conference committee where House and Senate representatives struggled to compromise on provisions of the bill, I can attest that confusion exists even among our lawmakers about what would constitute a valid photo ID. Imagine the delays at the polls if election workers are not fully aware.

South Carolina Election Commission officials have stated that our recent history holds no examples of impersonation of voters and no evidence that anyone has tried to steal another citizen's vote. The bill's proponents have failed to show why the current protections are inadequate to deter or prevent fraud.

The real threat of vote theft comes from the undue impact of voter ID laws on people who are lawfully entitled to vote but lack photo IDs. No, not everyone has a driver's license or a passport, but that certainly should not disqualify them from exercising their constitutional right to participate in our democracy. We should be encouraging people to exercise this fundamental right, not creating more hurdles.

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