

Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
SF 1577: Proposed Constitutional Amendment on Voting Requirements
Gwen Myers, League of Women Voters Minnesota
Feb. 1, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee

My name is Gwen Myers; I am a volunteer lobbyist for the League of Women Voters of Minnesota. The League is a good government organization, as you know, and volunteering with this organization was a natural next step when I retired after 35 years of teaching government in high school social studies classes.

My teaching career and my work with the League have given me enormous respect for our system of government, from the United States Constitution through township ordinances. It is this respect that leads me to urge your opposition to adding photo ID language to our state Constitution.

Election procedures do not belong in our State Constitution. Defining the procedures for voting – such as how to identify voters at the polling place – is not the function of a constitution; it is a function of law or statute. Laws can be modified and updated as the technology and methods for voting evolve. Constitutions are difficult to change, as we learned in the effort to repeal the 18th Amendment on prohibition.

A photo ID requirement has no place in our constitution for an additional reason. Our history is one of expanding voting rights to enable *all* citizens to vote. From the 18th century when the right to vote was limited to white male property owners, through the 19th century when African American men were enfranchised, into the 20th century when women gained the right to vote in 1920, the poll tax was abolished in 1964 and the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971 – it has been a proud march to an ever expanding electorate.

Putting a photo-ID requirement in our state constitution would be a step backward. Whatever the intentions of the authors of this bill, the consequences will create barriers to voting for some very specific groups of people, amounting to approximately 11% of the population who do not have government-issued photo IDs.

The right of citizens to vote is clearly fundamental to making our democratic system function and it must be guaranteed. The League of Women Voters, of course, was born out of the 19th Amendment and has worked ever since to protect the constitutional right of all citizens to vote. We believe that the proposed constitutional amendment in SF 1577 strikes a blow to that right.

We urge you to vote “no” on SF 1577.

Thank you for your time this afternoon.