



HOW PHILLY WORKS

The Real Skinny on the Voter ID Law for the November 5 election

Every once in a while, politicians force us to plow over old ground.

Since the Committee of Seventy is getting lots of questions about the status of Pennsylvania's controversial Voter ID law for the November 5 general election – provoked by TV ads produced by state government – this is one of those times.

To set the record straight: Unless you are a first-time voter (which we will explain in a minute), **YOU DO NOT NEED TO HAVE OR TO SHOW PHOTO IDENTIFICATION WHEN YOU VOTE AT THE POLLS ON NOVEMBER 5!**

Even if you understand this, many voters apparently do not. So please forward our **HOW PHILLY WORKS** to anyone you know who plans to vote in PA on Tuesday, November 5, 2013.

--October 30, 2013

I saw the TV ad and was confused. I thought the Voter ID law was not in play anymore.

The Voter ID law – which would require all PA voters to show photo identification each and every time they go to the polls to cast a vote – is still the law in Pennsylvania. However, it has not been in effect for voters at the polls during any election since it was passed in March 2012.

If it's a law, why isn't it in effect?

Because the law has been tied up in litigation for the last year and a half. As a result, it has not been in effect *at polling places* during the last four primary or general elections. The 2013 general election on November 5 will make number five.

Why are you emphasizing "at polling places?"

Court rulings that have blocked the Voter ID law have *specifically* been directed at voting at polling places. The Voter ID law also had new requirements for people who vote by absentee ballot. These requirements are in effect and you can read about them [here](#).

You said you would explain "first-time voter."

If you are voting for the first time ever (e.g., you are a newly registered voter), or are voting for the first time in a new voting division (e.g., you moved and are voting for the first time in your newly-assigned polling place), you must show either photo or non-photo identification to vote in person at the polls. [Here](#) are examples of what you can show. This requirement has been around for a long time and has nothing to do with the Voter ID law.



Back to the TV ads. It said “Show it, show it” and has pictures of photo IDs. I was confused.

So were many other people. And we agree. In our view, they were also needless since the Voter ID law is not in effect at the polls for the November 5 election. They also weren’t cheap. According to the state’s Auditor General, \$1 million of taxpayer dollars were spent to produce them.

Why are the ads even out there?

State officials have said it’s their job to educate voters about the types of photo identification they would need – and how to get a free one – in the event the Voter ID law is in effect at the polls in future elections.

Will I need photo identification in future elections?

That’s what the litigation is all about. Opponents say the Voter ID law is unconstitutional and should be struck down because it disenfranchises too many voters who don’t have, or who would have trouble getting, photo identification. Proponents say free photo identifications are readily available for anyone who doesn’t have one. If you want to read the legal documents submitted by both sides, click [here](#).

When will the litigation end?

Hard to predict. The case is in the hands of a judge of the Commonwealth Court, which is one of PA’s two intermediate appellate courts. Once the judge rules, the losing party will appeal to the PA Supreme Court. So that will take the matter well into 2014 when lots of Pennsylvanians will be voting in what looks to be a big showdown in the race for governor.

I know Corbett is running again. If the Voter ID law survives, will this help or hurt him?

We’re non-partisan and have no horse in the governor’s race. And any prediction at this point would be speculative. But, generally speaking, Republicans favor the Voter ID law and Democrats don’t. While Voter ID won’t be the only hot election issue, current PA stats show about 2.9 million registered Republicans and a little more than 3.8 million Democrats.

Last spring, a poll worker asked me to show photo identification. Will I be asked again on Nov. 5?

Poll workers are supposed to ask. But, and this is really important, they are *forbidden* to say you won’t be able to vote in future elections if you don’t have one. The Commonwealth Court judge said this would mislead voters (and, in fact, did mislead voters in recent elections when poll workers gave voters this information).

What should I do if I’m told I won’t be able to vote in future elections without photo ID?

Report this immediately to the Committee of Seventy by calling our **Election Protection 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683) hotline**. Our non-partisan volunteers will report it to election officials to make sure this stops.

So the bottom line is...?



MOST VOTERS DO NOT NEED TO HAVE OR TO SHOW PHOTO IDENTIFICATION WHEN THEY VOTE AT THE POLLS ON NOVEMBER 5! Anyone with questions before the election should call us and we'll be happy to talk it through.

If you enjoy this series, please help us continue it by [donating](#) today or contributing via the United Way Choice option (#1786)! We are a non-partisan non-profit that does not accept government money – your support is truly appreciated!

*As always, if you have any questions or ideas for future **HOW PHILLY WORKS**, please send your ideas to futureofthecity@seventy.org. Join the conversation - “Like” us on [facebook](#) and “Follow” us on [Twitter](#)!*