

North Carolina Voter ID Bill Signed Into Law By Gov. Pat McCrory, Sparking Lawsuits

By Luke Johnson: 8/12/13



North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory (R) signed a bill Monday requiring photo identification at the polls and eliminating a slew of voting measures designed to protect against voter disenfranchisement.

The governor, eschewing a more traditional signing ceremony, announced by way of a YouTube video that he had signed House Bill 589.

The bill will require voters to show photo identification -- a driver's license, passport, veteran's ID, tribal card -- beginning in the 2016 elections. Student IDs are not an acceptable form of identification. The bill also reduces early voting by a week, eliminates same-day registration, ends pre-registration for 16-and-17 year-olds and a student civics program, kills an annual state-sponsored voter registration drive and lessens the amount of public reporting required for so-called dark money groups, also known as 501(c)(4)s.

The bill does provide for a "free ID" to be offered at DMVs, though the state estimates that between 203,351 and 318,643 voters registered in North Carolina lack ID, and that providing them with one would cost \$834,200 in 2013 and 2014, and \$24,100 every two years after that.

McCrory said the bill was necessary even if there are very few reported cases of voter fraud. "Even if the instances of misidentified people casting votes are low, that shouldn't prevent us from putting this non-burdensome safeguard in place," he said in a Raleigh News and Observer op-ed. "Just because you haven't been robbed doesn't mean you shouldn't lock your doors at night or when you're away from home."

Just hours after McCrory's signature, the ACLU of North Carolina and a coalition of other groups filed a lawsuit against the bill, charging that it violates the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The North Carolina NAACP and Advancement Project followed shortly after, filing another lawsuit.

The latest bill comes after the Supreme Court struck down the core of the Voting Rights Act, which required Southern states with a history of racial discrimination -- including North Carolina -- to have their laws cleared by the Department of Justice. The Justice Department could still try to invalidate the recent North Carolina law on the grounds that it deliberately discriminates against voters, a much higher standard than merely proving it disproportionately affects minority voters.

The bill has the potential to reduce turnout for key Democratic constituencies -- minorities, the elderly and students -- with the slew of new requirements, even beyond the new measures for identification. President Barack Obama narrowly won North Carolina in 2008 but lost it in 2012, and in 2016, the state is likely to be a battleground.

The legislation, passed by the Republican-controlled legislature over the objections of Democrats before heading to McCrory's desk, is the latest of a string of conservative legislation signed into law in the state. McCrory has also signed measures introducing new restrictions for abortion clinics (attached to a motorcycle safety bill), expanding concealed-carry permits to bars and restaurants, and cutting unemployment benefits.
