

## **Women and Voter ID**

### **By Democracy North Carolina for NC Women Matter**

#### **Overview**

Conservative legislators across the U.S. are changing voting laws to make it harder for many groups to vote in 2012. These lawmakers fear a surge of new voters similar to one that happened in 2008. That Presidential election saw record numbers of young voters, women voters and voters of color. In 2008, North Carolina led the nation as the state with the biggest increase in voter turnout over 2004. That year, NC saw a record 70% turnout of 6.2 million registered voters, compared to the 64% turnout in 2004. In terms of turnout among the voting age population, the 2008 election put the Tar Heel state at number 19 in the US, the first time we've been among the top 20 states in more than 100 years.

In the mid-term election of 2010, ultra-conservative lawmakers swept the elections of many legislatures. Since then, over 30 states have introduced legislation to require voter photo identification. In 2011, five states in the US passed strict voter photo ID measures with the goal that new law will be in place for the 2012 election: Kansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin. If the voter photo ID laws in all five of these states re enacted, over 3.2 million voters could be impacted.

Voter photo ID is just one example of several significant changes in voting law since 2010. For more details on these laws, see this report from the Brennan Center for Justice:  
[http://brennan.3cdn.net/34876f1cabd6d0e252\\_kwm6id717.pdf](http://brennan.3cdn.net/34876f1cabd6d0e252_kwm6id717.pdf).

#### **Voter Photo ID in North Carolina**

In 2011, conservative lawmakers in North Carolina introduced H-351, which requires voters to show a government-issued, photo ID in order to vote. Their claim was that this measure is needed to address wide-spread voter fraud. However, the data show that voter fraud, particularly voter impersonation (which photo id is meant to address) is extremely rare and NC already has safeguards against fraud in place. At the same time, the data also show that 450,000 active, registered NC voters lack the kind of photo identification H-351 requires. These voters are overwhelmingly seniors, *women*, youth, African Americans and low income voters.

The voter photo ID bill passed the NC House and Senate in 2011 but was vetoed by Governor Perdue. The legislature failed to override her veto during the 2011-2012 session, so voter photo ID in North Carolina is dead for now. However, conservative lawmakers are expected to try again in 2013 to pass this and other measures to restrict ballot access in North Carolina.

#### **What's at Stake:**

- Over 450,000 active, registered voters in North Carolina lack the type of photo identification that conservative lawmakers want to require voters to show each time they vote. Women make up 54% of registered voters, yet they make up an overwhelming 63.1% of the voters who lack this type of identification. Seniors and people of color make up 32% of voters who lack this type of ID.

- The same lawmakers pushing voter ID want to pass other measures intended to restrict voting, like reducing early voting days and hours and ending same day voter registration in North Carolina. Early voting and same day registration are efficient and highly popular among NC voters. 60% of all voters in 2008 voted early and 250,000 people used same day registration. Numbers from the 2012 Primary Election show the continued popularity of these positive election reforms.
- Efforts to restrict access to the ballot box are un-American – they disenfranchise honest NC voters and skew the political process in favor of the already well advantaged.
- Voting matters – and who we elect to office matters. The 2012 election is an opportunity for women to stand up for ourselves and others. We must protect our voting rights and elect leaders who will enact policies to *increase* voter participation and make sure the voices of every day people are heard.