

**LWVMT Testimony opposing HB108
January 16, 2012**

Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Committee, Staff and Guests:

Good morning, I am Nancy Detrick, President of the League of Women Voters of Montana. I want to thank you for the opportunity to share our strong concerns about this legislation. The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 by the women who worked for passage of the 19th Amendment. For 92 years, its purpose has been to work to ensure the right to vote of every eligible citizen and to educate our citizens about their responsibility to vote. We are a non-partisan organization which does not support candidates or parties.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Montana, I come before you today in strong opposition to House Bill 108 –a government program that would require many voters to show a new form of photo identification in order to exercise their constitutional right to vote. We all want free, fair and accessible elections and unfortunately this legislation move us in the opposite direction.

Requiring citizens without a driver's license to obtain another form of State-issued identification is an example of wasteful use of taxpayers' money. This legislation could cost citizens of Montana thousands of dollars to implement annually. We all want responsible, cost-efficient government. Instead we are confronted with legislation that will waste taxpayer dollars to pay for this new state issued ID when our state already has effective identification procedures in place. There is no such thing as a free voter ID. There are significant on-going costs for state and local governments, as well as indirect costs for citizens who apply for the ID.

Besides the cost to implement and maintain this new government program, the new ID requirements represent one of the most serious threats in years to our efforts to ensure the right of every eligible citizen to vote and have their vote counted. If Montanans want to live up to its promise to provide all citizens with the same opportunities, then we can't pass laws that block them from voting, and deny them the opportunity to participate equally in our democracy.

This requirement would potentially disenfranchise hundreds of registered voters who do not have a driver's license due to disability, age, illness, transportation, or financial issues. The burden will be greatest for citizens for whom it is most cost prohibitive or inconvenient to take off work, get transportation, stand in line, and apply for documentation. Often these individuals don't have the underlying documentation that is needed to get an ID. Thus, this requirement could disenfranchise the very people who currently must work the hardest to vote.

We share your concern for the integrity of the voting process but Montana ID laws are already stronger than federal requirements. Free, fair and accessible elections are important to all of us.

Our state government should be in the business of making it easier for citizens to vote. Voting brings us together as a country and is something all Montanans can do to help strengthen our community. All eligible voters should cast a ballot on Election Day for their future, their children's future and the future of this great State. LWV of Montana calls on the State Legislature to reject this legislation.

Thank you

Nancy Detrick, President

Billings, Montana

League of Women Voters of Montana