

Get Ready Now for Wisconsin's New Voter Photo ID Rules

Municipal Clerks are urging voters to plan now to make sure they have the right photo ID to vote starting in February 2012.

Voter Photo ID became law in Wisconsin in June, and most people already have the photo ID required to vote. In addition to requiring voters to show an acceptable photo ID to receive a ballot, the law contains other important changes to the voting process. Here are the new rules for voting at the polls on Election Day and by absentee ballot:

Election Day

On Election Day, voters must show one of eight different kinds of photo ID to receive a ballot. Four of the most common types of acceptable photo IDs are a Wisconsin driver license, a Wisconsin state ID card, a military ID card or a U.S. Passport. These photo IDs are valid even if they've expired after the most recent general election which was November 2, 2010.

Four other kinds of photo ID are also acceptable, if they have not expired: A Certificate of Naturalization; a driver license or state ID card receipt issued by the DMV; an ID issued by a Federally recognized Wisconsin Indian tribe; or, a photo ID issued by a Wisconsin accredited university or college that meets certain requirements, and is accompanied by proof of enrollment.

Note that many Wisconsin colleges and universities are issuing special student ID cards that comply with the Voter Photo ID Law, while a few are modifying existing student ID cards. Students who do not have one of the other acceptable forms of ID should check with their school for more information about getting an ID card.

It is important for voters to know that their photo ID is not required to include a current address. The purpose of requiring a photo ID is to prove your identity, not where you live. Also, the name on your photo ID does not have to match your name on the poll list exactly, so Jim is perfectly acceptable for James, Sue for Susan, etc.

If you do not have a valid Wisconsin driver license or state ID card, you can receive a free state ID card from your local DMV if you specifically request a free ID for voting purposes. Please contact your local DVM or your local clerk for more information.

Another important change on Election Day is that voters must sign the poll book next to their name to receive a ballot. Voters should sign the poll book as they would normally sign any other document, i.e. a check, the back of a credit card, etc. Voters with physical disabilities may be exempt from signing.

You can still register to vote on Election Day, but voter registration requirements have changed. A person must now be a resident of the jurisdiction in which they wish to vote for 28 consecutive days instead of the previous 10-day residency requirement.

Absentee Voting

The Voter Photo ID Law also made important changes to absentee voting.

During in-person absentee voting at the clerk's office, voters must present a photo ID, just like on Election Day. The period for in-person absentee voting has been shortened. It now begins the third Monday before the election, and ends at 5 p.m. or the close of business, whichever is later, the Friday before the election.

Photo ID will also be required for mail-in absentee voting, and most absentee voters must provide a photocopy of their photo ID card with their absentee ballot request. Voters who fax or email the clerk to request an absentee ballot may return a photocopy of their photo ID with their completed ballot.

There is an important exception for voters in nursing homes and care facilities, as well as those at home who are "indefinitely confined" due to age, physical illness or infirmity, or who are disabled for an indefinite period. Instead of providing a copy of their photo ID, they may have their absentee witness verify their identity. If you meet the definition of an "indefinitely confined voter," please contact your local clerk for specific information about voting rights for voters in nursing homes and care facilities.

For specific questions on how the new Voter ID law affects you, please contact your local Clerk's Office.

Voters are also encouraged to visit the Wisconsin Government Accountability's Voter ID website, <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/photo-id>, for additional information about the new law. A statewide multimedia public education campaign about Voter Photo ID will start in early January 2012.

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