



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
NEW HAMPSHIRE

www.LWVNH.org

4 Park St. Room 200
Concord, NH 03301

April 18, 2017

re **SB 3—relative to domicile for voting purposes as amended by the Senate**

To Chair Griffin and members of the House Election Law Committee:

As you know, the League of Women Voters is a non-partisan grassroots organization that has been working for 97 years to encourage voting and informed participation in government. In this legislative session in particular we have been following bills that seem aimed at tightening voter eligibility as a reaction to unsubstantiated rumors and allegations of widespread voter fraud. Perception rather than reality seems to be the motivating force behind this bill.

The League regards the right to vote as the most important right we have, because by voting we have a voice in all the other actions of government that affect us. Any attempt to deny that right, just because a person does not have the same kind of permanent home nor typical photo ID that you and I likely have, is an attempt to pass judgment on the very people who may need a voice the most.

We appreciate that the amendment attempts to list a number of ways for voters to demonstrate domicile. For some of us, no problem. For others, however, the effect is much more serious: on a potential voter who may be unemployed and living with a friend for a while, or a potential voter with a disability who may not understand each element of the lengthy form submitted, or a potential voter who is scratching his head wondering why in his old state his word was good enough but New Hampshire demands written proof ASAP—the effect is to make voting seem somehow the bastion of privileged “others.”

Today various people will address some of the technical details that make this bill unworkable. League wants first to make the human argument: Filling out a lengthy form, signing and initialing in multiple places that I understand voter fraud is a punishable crime, will turn voting from a joy that we live in a democracy to a fear-inducing event that the authorities will come knocking on my door because I forgot to bring some paperwork with me, as though I committed a criminal act. And if I were one of those people whose paperwork is never organized, I would be highly unlikely to find the documentation easily and get it copied and to the town clerk in the allotted time. My grandson’s best buddy comes to mind...I hate to picture that young man getting a \$5000 fine because he is forgetful.

I will leave it to others to explain how hard it can be to prove domicile when mail goes to post office boxes, when a passport does not have an address, when getting a new drivers license to show address change costs money (think poll tax), and when a deed or mortgage or property tax bill proves only ownership, not domicile.

To touch on one technical point of the amendment: Supervisors of the checklist are not currently authorized to drive around town, come onto someone’s property, knock on the door and ask who lives there. Not only is this something most supervisors would be loath or fearful to do, one must wonder what the result of a “yes” or “no” answer would be. Would a supervisor trust the word of whoever answered the door more than the sworn statement of the applicant for a ballot? Why? And if the friend

who had been living there has since moved on, does a “no” answer indicate a fraudulent vote or merely a normal amount of moving around? Why, in the bigger picture, is a letter from someone else attesting to domicile more trustworthy than the voter’s own affidavit? And if the landlord won’t respond to a request for a letter, is the potential voter to be fined for having checked the box saying he would provide such a letter within 30 days? Apparently so.

We realize the bill’s sponsor would reply that supervisors are not required to make these home visits; they can send the affidavits to the Secretary of State if a voter does not return with acceptable documents in the time frame allowed. But this is exactly what election officials do now, as soon as they process the affidavits, so we ask why this revision is needed. It would, in fact, delay passing along affidavits to the Secretary of State by as much as 30 days.

If the intent of this bill is to deter potential voters, the bill will do that. If the intent is to slow down lines at the polls and at town clerks’ offices, it will do that with the lengthy application form. If the intent is to create more work for supervisors of the checklist so that people will not even run for that office, it will do that.

But if the intent is to restore integrity to New Hampshire’s election process, I would ask what more could one look for in terms of integrity than to examine the results of last November’s election: we elected a Republican Legislature and Governor and a Democrat Senator and cast our electoral ballots for a Democrat for President. In typical NH fashion, we voted independently. I hope that this committee and this legislature are not questioning the validity of their own elections.

I ask the committee to consider why this cumbersome and discriminatory bill is needed. Will it be like the infamous Polaroid cameras purchased two years ago to take mug shots of voters without IDs, to be affixed to ID affidavits? How did that one work out, other than someone at the Secretary of State’s office thinking “Someone was having a really bad hair day on November 8.” Before we can fix a problem, we need to figure out what the problem is. This bill does neither.

The League of Women Voters NH urges a vote of “Inexpedient to Legislate” on SB 3.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Tentarelli, president League of Women Voters New Hampshire
home phone and email: 603-763-9296 LWV@kenliz.net