

Voting Law Forum a Success

By Phyllis Makuck

Under severe storm warnings, 65 people made their way to Joslyn Hall at Carteret Community College on April 29 to learn about North Carolina's new voting law. Speakers Lindy Robinson, director of Carteret County Board of Elections, and Bob Hall, executive director of Democracy NC, did excellent jobs explaining details of this complex new law and answering questions from the audience. Rev. Sally B. White of the Unitarian Coastal Fellowship served as moderator, setting a strong non-partisan tone and keeping the program on target. Here's some of what I learned:

- The new law eliminates same-day voter registration and DMV pre-registration for teens getting their first driver's license.
- Early voting is one week shorter, but hours have been extended to compensate. So, the number of early-voting hours is the same.
- Out-of-precinct votes are no longer counted unless the voter has made an unreported move and votes at his/her former precinct.
- Straight-party voting is eliminated. In general elections, candidates are identified by parties, but must be voted for individually.
- Effective January 2016, one of the following photo IDs will be required to vote: a current North Carolina driver's license, a current Department of Motor Vehicles ID card, Military ID, Veterans ID, US Passport, Tribal Enrollment Card.
- The following *cannot* be used to meet the photo ID requirement: student ID cards, employee ID cards, credit cards, etc.
- Photo IDs will not have to match exactly the name and address on one's voter's registration as long as a poll worker can identify the voter from the photo.

- Voters over 70 can use driver's licenses that expired on or after their 70th birthdays.
- Disabled voters or voters who do not feel physically fit to go into a polling place may opt for curbside voting. Curbside voters do not have to show a photo ID. They do need to show two identifying documents such as a social security card, utility bill, paycheck, bank statement or other government issued document showing name and current address.
- Absentee voters must send the Board of Elections an official request form to receive a mail-in ballot. They can no longer just write a letter requesting a ballot.

Bob Hall explained the role of his organization, Democracy North Carolina, which has been in existence for over 20 years. It is nonpartisan and committed to increasing voter participation, eliminating fraud and reducing the influence of big money in politics. He talked about other aspects of North Carolina's new law involving campaign financing, explained concerns his organization has with the new law and some ways to ensure "fairness, accessibility and security." These, he said, are the three requirements for having "a government that is truly of the people, for the people and by the people."

He made the strong point that voting is a time when the playing field is level. It doesn't matter your age, race, economic status, etc. Everyone's vote counts the same.

Here are some of his concerns:

- The new voting law raises campaign financing limits, eliminates public financing for nonpartisan positions such as judicial seats, gives parties greater flexibility in spending corporate money, requires less disclosure for outside spending and repeals the "Stand by Your Ad" law.
- In the past, same-day registration provided an opportunity for 100,000

or more voters to register and vote, and DMV voter pre-registration resulted in about 60,000 new young voters. Compensating for the loss of these voter registration programs will require concerted efforts.

This article does not present every facet of the new law or exhaustively report all the good information shared at the April 29 forum. The event ended with active participation of those attending to identify strategies for educating the public, registering new voters and publicizing coalition events.

The Voter Rights Coalition of Carteret County will work with the Board of Elections and with Democracy NC to continue to educate the public and ensure that every eligible voter who wants to vote can vote.

Both of these organizations welcome your participation in and support for their education, photo ID and voter registration efforts. Also, if you have a group who would like to learn about the new law or just want more information, you may contact VoterRightsCarteret@gmail.com. You may also go to www.democracy-nc.org or call the Carteret County Board of Elections at 728-8460.



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