

NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

For Immediate Release: Tuesday, November 28, 2006

Civil Rights Group Criticizes New Voter ID Requirements as Disenfranchising Vulnerable People

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association is attacking the federal government's proposed plan to amend the *Canada Elections Act* to require identification from voters at the polls. Bill C-31 will require Canadians to produce ID in order to vote in federal elections. Those without ID would be able to swear an oath that they are eligible but must have another voter who has the required ID to vouch for them.

BCCLA President Jason Gratl: "Replacing lost or stolen identification is a cumbersome administrative hassle. Canadians who lack the wherewithal to replace or obtain photo identification should not be punished with disenfranchisement. Unless there is significant evidence of potential voter fraud, election officials should use the least onerous method to establish voter status."

The BCCLA opposes the amendments because they will disenfranchise the most vulnerable and voiceless in society from making their mark at the polls on election day. We expect the legislation to disenfranchise homeless and transient persons who have no fixed addresses and no identification.

Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer has testified before the Parliamentary committee that there is no evidence of fraud that would justify the changes: "I have no evidence that would lead me to believe that there has been any fraud in this country, based on the testimony heard. I have no evidence."

The BCCLA proposes that individuals without ID should be able to swear that they are eligible to vote using a statutory declaration, a legal instrument that was successfully used during the last federal election in Vancouver with approval by the deputy returning officer. If anything, our government should take steps to encourage the less fortunate to participate with dignity in the political process.

The BCCLA will be appearing today before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to testify and oppose the amendments in Bill C-31.

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jason Gratl, President 604-317-1919
Murray Mollard, Executive Director 604-767-7421

info@bccla.org
www.bccla.org