



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Civil Rights Group Criticizes Voter ID Requirements in Advance of Federal Election – Wide Scale Disenfranchisement Likely

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association opposes new federal voting rules that require all voters to produce identification at the polls. Amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* will require a driver's license or two pieces of approved ID that contain a voter's name and address to confirm voter eligibility. Those without ID can swear an oath that they are eligible but must have another voter who has the required ID to vouch for them.

BCCLA President Rob Holmes: "The right to vote is fundamental and belongs to every citizen 18 years old and up. Putting unnecessary restrictions on the right to vote is wrong. We have opposed these amendments from the outset. Countless homeless and transient persons may lose their right to vote. But it goes further, thousands of individuals who simply don't have current identification with their new address on it, such as students, seniors, those who don't drive and people who have disabilities, may be barred from voting. Knowing of this complication may lead many simply not to bother trying. With more concern about the drop in voter turnout in recent years, dumb laws like this should be repealed by Parliament or tossed out by the courts."

In 2006, before the new rules were introduced, the former Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, testified before a Parliamentary committee that there was 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 has proposed 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 has appeared before Parliamentary committees to oppose voter ID requirements and will intervene in a constitutional challenge to the law scheduled for 2009.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Robert Holmes, President
Murray Mollard, Executive Director

604-681-1310
604-630-9752

www.bccla.org