Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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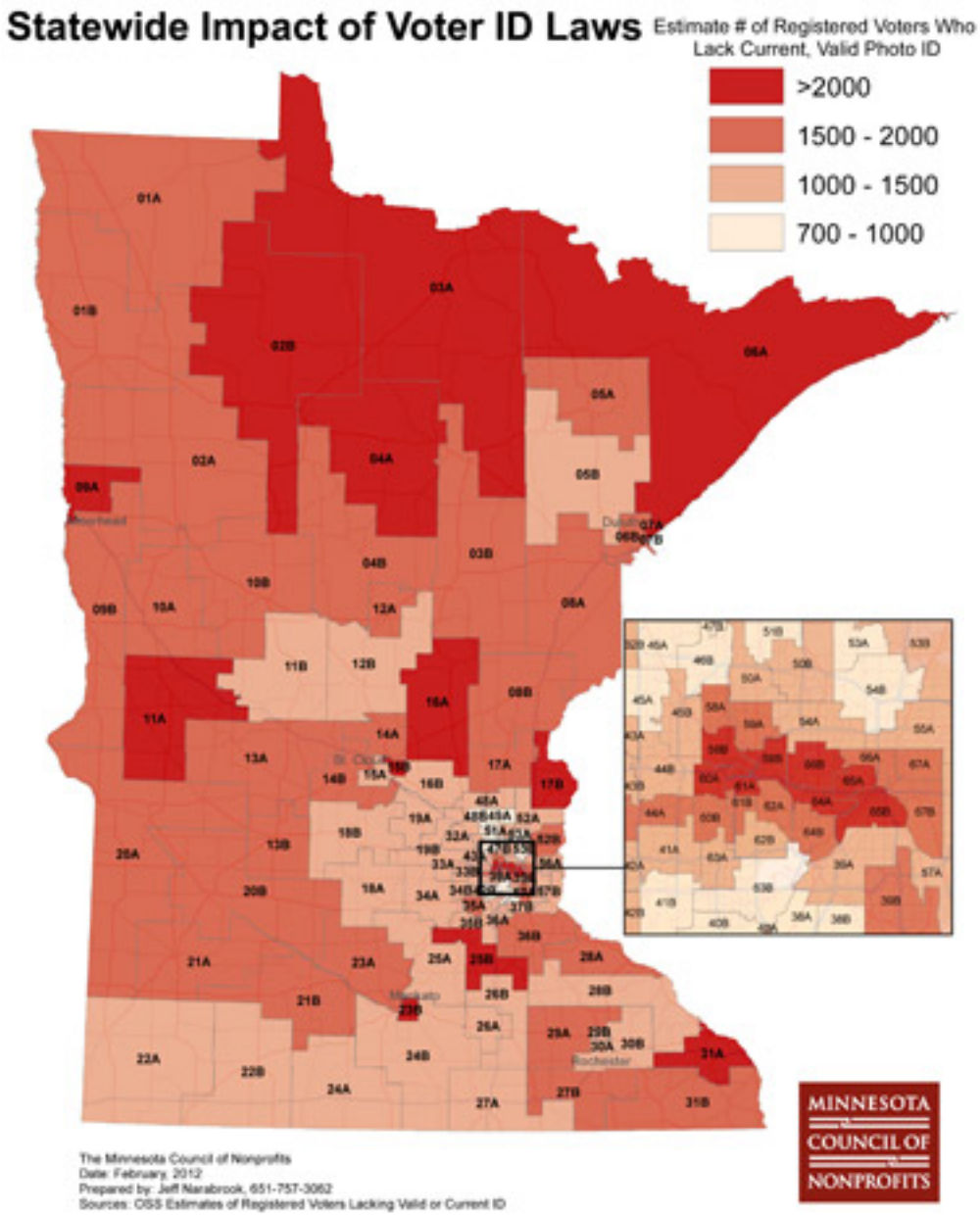
With little more than a month to go before the Nov. 6 general election, the movement to defeat a proposed voter ID amendment is picking up steam.

But opponents of the measure warn that polls still show the ballot initiative would pass if the election were held today. According to Congressman Keith Ellison, at one point during the summer, 83 percent of voters supported the voter ID amendment but a recent poll shows that number is just 52 percent, but still a winning margin.

If the measure passes, Minnesota voters would be required to present a valid state identification card when attempting to cast a ballot. Ellison said that seems benign enough, but the measure could prevent everyone from active military personnel to women who have had their names

changed due to marriage or divorce to college students attending school in the state to those who simply do not currently possess a state ID. Ellison said the latter group is heavily made up of African-Americans.

"This proposed amendment is a solution to a problem that doesn't exist," said Ellison. "There is no voter fraud in Minnesota."



Many believe the state ballot question is part of a concerted national effort to suppress voter turnout among groups that traditionally vote Democratic. In 2008 African-Americans overwhelming supported candidate Barack Obama in his historic bid for the White House. Recent polls show the President polling as high as 95 percent among African-Americans and 65 percent among Hispanic-Americans.

Many consider Minnesota to be a liberal, fair-minded, state and are shocked that such an

amendment to the state constitution would be proposed.

"I expect this in Florida. I expect this in Texas – in Ohio, but I never thought Minnesota would be the place to have the worst, most restrictive voting in the nation," said Barbara Arnwine of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "That's what would happen if this thing passes. Minnesota would have the fewest exemptions (to voter ID). Only Mississippi would be as restrictive. Being in the company of Mississippi is no honor."

According to Arnwine, if the amendment passes, 700,000 state voters would be disenfranchised. Nationally, Arnwine said various voter ID laws, all either put in place or proposed by Republican officials, would affect millions. In Florida for example, Arnwine said most third-party groups such as the League of Women Voters and the Boy Scouts of America quit registering voters for fear of criminal prosecution. That law was struck down, but many say the damage was done with new voter registration falling from nearly 300,000 new voters in 2008 to about 18,000 to date this year.

"In Ohio they purged one-point-three-million registered voters from the voting rolls," said Arnwine, whose group is fighting voter suppression in several states including Florida, Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and others.

Arnwine said in addition to fighting voter suppression, the group is monitoring voter intimidation in several states. She said a Tea Party back group, True the Vote, is involved in a campaign to intimidate voters of color. True the Vote is recruiting one million "poll watchers" nationwide to police against possible voter fraud in the upcoming election. Arnwine said during the 2008 general election her group had to get a court injunction against True the Vote to stop its watchers from harassing voters.

Arnwine is encouraging voters to vote early where early voting is permitted. "That way if there is any question to your eligibility to vote you can find out before it's too late and your right to vote can still be preserved," said Arnwine. "Even someone like me, 'Ms. Vote' can have problems so it can happen to anybody."