

Statement of

The Honorable Herb Kohl

United States Senator
Wisconsin
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Statement for the Record
Senator Herb Kohl
Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearing
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Earlier this year, the Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing on older voters and the various barriers they face in exercising their right to vote. Witnesses shared their expertise on such issues as poll accessibility for older and disabled voters, voting within the long-term care setting, and finally, on the issue of Voter ID.

Studies have found that seniors are more likely than younger populations to lose their right to vote when Voter ID is implemented. My state of Wisconsin has been battling over its own Voter ID proposals. A 2005 study by the University of Wisconsin found that 23 percent of people age 65 and older in Wisconsin - nearly 200,000 older voters - do not have a driver's license or other photo ID.

Several factors explain this statistic. The financial cost of collecting the documents necessary to obtain a photo ID is particularly burdensome to older voters who live on fixed incomes, and can be considered akin to a poll tax. In addition, older Americans are far more likely to have disabilities than other citizens, making it more difficult for them to travel and to navigate the bureaucratic procedures required to procure a photo ID. Equally important, we learned at our hearing that, due to limited access to health care, many minority citizens born before and during the 1960s were not delivered in hospitals. Therefore, their state of birth is less likely to have a birth certificate for them on file.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court's recent decision to uphold Indiana's requirement that voters present a government-issued ID is sure to have national implications for current and future Voter ID laws, and will allow for continued discrimination against the elderly, minority and low-income populations who are less likely to have proper identification.

The conclusion drawn from the Aging Committee hearing is that if we do not remove the barriers that prevent elderly and disabled citizens from exercising their right to vote, then we are - for all intents and purposes - disenfranchising them. The right to vote is fundamental and undeniable, and it does not expire with age.