



Simple, evocative stories about the impact of public policies on ordinary people

ISSUE | CIVIC PARTICIPATION

OVERVIEW

For most people, voting is a vital right and the single best way to fulfill one's responsibilities as a citizen. Regrettably, recent legislative initiatives could make it harder for ordinary citizens to exercise that sacred right.

INTRODUCTION

Ellie is a 90-year-old, life-time resident of a small county in eastern NC. She does not drive a car and has never needed a driver's license. In fact, while she has worked all her life to support her family, she has never had a photo ID card.

Ellie is proud of her voting record. Since winning the right to vote after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, she has voted in every election, 46 elections and counting. She calls voting the duty of every good citizen, a duty she cherishes.



PERSONAL IMPACT

In 2016, Ellie discovered that she was no longer eligible to vote. On election day, she showed up at her local polling place as she had done so many times before. After waiting for two hours to vote, she finally got to the head of the long line, and gave her name to the election official.

This time, however, instead of being welcomed and directed to a voting booth, Ellie was asked for a government-issued photo identification card. Embarrassed, Ellie said she didn't have one, adding that she had never needed one before. The election official told her that the State had instituted new rules to prevent fraud and that, because of these new rules, she could not vote without a photo ID card. Stunned, Ellie was turned away. And Ellie, long the very model of an engaged citizen, had become a second class citizen, stripped of her right to vote.

POLICY OUTLOOK

In 2013, the NC General Assembly passed HB-589, legislation that would prohibit voters from casting a ballot without a government-issued photo ID card. Promoted by partisan interests in Washington, DC, this legislation purports to solve a problem for which there is little corroborating evidence (i.e. voting by individuals using a false identity) and fails to address other forms of fraud.

HB-589 also reversed or curtailed several policies designed to increase voter turnout (instituted by prior legislatures), including public financing for Council of State (COS) and judicial elections (effective 2013), Same-Day Registration (SDR) and teenage pre-registration (effective 2014) and early voting (the state reduced the early voting period to ten days effective 2014).

