

Council votes to push for changes in voter ID bill

Aldermen call for more photo options

By [Larry Sandler](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Milwaukee aldermen called Tuesday for state lawmakers to rewrite a bill that would require voters to show photo identification at the polls.

The Common Council voted, 8-1, to [oppose the legislation](#) as written and to urge the Legislature to expand the list of acceptable forms of identification, add sites for issuing state identification cards and change proposed absentee ballot identification rules.

Republicans, who control both houses of the Legislature and the governor's office, are [pushing the bill](#), which they say is needed to combat voter fraud. Democrats say fraud is rare and the bill would hinder voting by minorities who predominantly vote Democratic.

"This is a bad bill, and it will disenfranchise people - a lot of people," Ald. Ashanti Hamilton said. "For us not to take a position in opposition to it would be irresponsible."

The bill would allow three forms of identification: a driver's license, an ID card issued by the state Department of Transportation or a military ID card. The council joined top city and state election officials in urging the Legislature to add passports and student ID cards.

Ald. Milele Coggs said many minority, elderly and disabled residents don't have driver's licenses. State identification cards would be free, but residents must show a copy of their birth certificate to obtain them, and since the Milwaukee County register of deeds' office charges \$20 a copy for birth certificates, Coggs said the requirement amounts to an illegal poll tax.

The bill includes an exemption for older adults in nursing homes and other facilities, but Coggs said that most older residents don't live in such places and that it is hard for elderly and disabled

residents to reach state Division of Motor Vehicles offices where ID cards are issued.

Ald. Bob Donovan disagreed, saying, "I don't personally think it's unreasonable to ask someone to get an ID to go out and vote."

Donovan said people had been arrested for voter fraud and officials should eliminate "even the possibility of voter fraud." But Ald. Nik Kovac said proven cases of voter fraud were a tiny fraction of the number of votes cast.

The bill also would require voters to include a copy of their photo ID with their absentee ballots. Because absentee ballots are not opened until election day, that rule could lead to many absentee ballots being disqualified, Ald. Terry Witkowski said. The council asked lawmakers to let voters show ID when they request absentee ballots.

Ald. Jim Bohl agreed the bill was flawed but said the council should focus on changing it rather than opposing it. Hamilton said city lobbyists could do both.

Voting to oppose the bill and seek changes were council President Willie Hines Jr. and Aldermen Bob Bauman, Michael Murphy, Tony Zielinski, Coggs, Hamilton, Kovac and Witkowski. Only Donovan dissented. Aldermen Joe Dudzik Jr., Jim Witkowiak and Bohl abstained. Aldermen Joe Davis Sr., Robert Puente and Willie Wade were absent.