

VICE CHAIR

Licenses Committee

MEMBER

Finance & Personnel Committee



MILELE A. COGGS

6th District Alderwoman

A Pricy Solution in Search of a Problem

Statement of Alderwoman Milele A. Cogg May 11, 2011

Over the last five months this state has been caught up in nearly continuous turmoil centered on the state budget and the overall financial status of the state. As a result, the Milwaukee Public Schools is facing the elimination of nearly 1,000 jobs, seniors are faced with the potential loss of their Medicare coverage, municipalities are preparing for major cuts to aid for repairing streets and roads, and public workers are concerned with losing bargaining rights and increased pension and health insurance contributions.

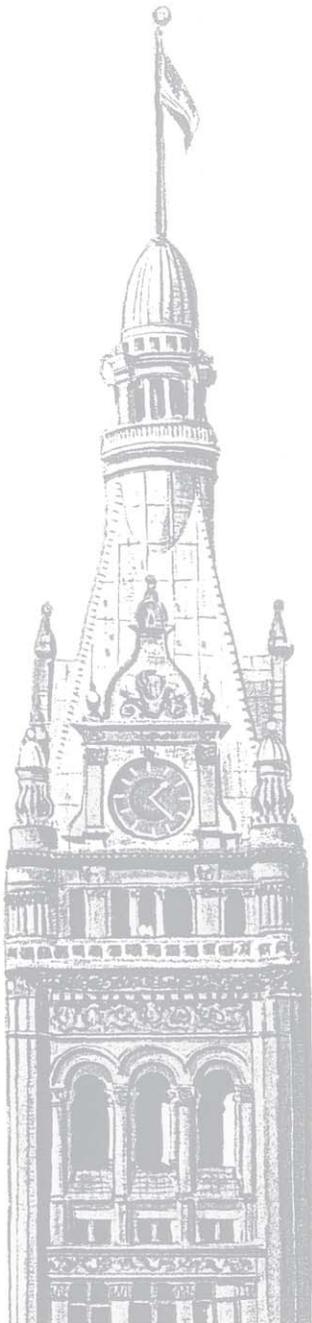
But in the midst of it all, today the Assembly is expected to vote on and likely pass a controversial, confusing, and ever changing "Voter ID" bill. This bill would:

- Require voters to show a Wisconsin driver's license, a state-issued ID card, a military ID, a passport or a naturalization certificate. Students attending University of Wisconsin schools and other colleges would only be allowed to use school IDs that were issued within two years of the election.

This requirement **disenfranchises** elderly residents who often do not have transportation to get to a DMV office, or have ailments that prevent them from applying for ID at a DMV office. And it does the same to low-income and hourly wage workers who cannot afford to pay for a copy of their birth certificate – a key way for them to get the necessary form of ID. These workers typically cannot afford to take time off to obtain an ID at a DMV office.

- Take away a Wisconsin voter's ability to vote a straight-party ticket, although state military and overseas voters still could because of a federal law.

-More-



- Require people to have lived at their residence for 28 days before the election – a huge jump from the current 10 days - to vote at their polling place. Those who lived at their residence for less than 28 days could vote from their previous polling place if it were in Wisconsin. Again, this change would require voters during each election to prove where they live.

Some components of the bill would be implemented immediately, but most would go into effect at the worst possible time – the February 2012 Presidential Primary election – when a larger-than-normal voter turnout can be expected. So not only will there be throngs of voters going to the polls, but those voters will very likely not be fully aware of the many changes brought by the bill. Clerks around the state will be dealing with confused and angry residents who will either lose their ability to vote and/or who will become so frustrated they will simply give up on casting their ballot.

So while the state budget turmoil is all about cutting and reducing programs and services across the board to save money, the bill – ironically – carries an estimated cost of up to \$5 million (based on state fiscal estimates). That irony is multiplied when you consider the bill's "other" costs -- disenfranchised votes lost and the services and jobs that the money could be used for. A full \$5 million could save jobs and programming in the state's public school systems, restore some much needed funding for recycling, and fill a few more potholes in cities across the state next year.

In Milwaukee alone, \$5 million could restore approximately almost half of the estimated \$10.3 million anticipated cut in shared revenue. It could restore nearly all of the estimated \$5.5 million cut to Milwaukee County Transit Aids, and it could erase "High Poverty Aid cut" of 10% (\$1.9 million) which goes to school districts with at least 50% of their enrolled students qualifying for free or reduced price lunches.

As legislators, we have the power to make laws that impact the lives of those we serve. One would hope and expect that much thought and research goes into the legislation we create and that legislation with a price tag as large as this be based on an evidenced need. In this case, I believe there is no REAL need.

In a study of three million ballots cast in Wisconsin in November 2008, only 20 (0.000007%) were found to have probable voter fraud (most by felons who illegally voted). This bill does nothing to address how the law was allegedly broken in the majority of those 20 cases.

So with little to no demonstrated evidence of necessity, much dialogue has centered on "restoration of voter confidence." Given the recent happenings in the statewide Supreme Court election, I strongly believe voter confidence would be strengthened by greater attention being paid to education of election staff, improved election equipment/technology and more standardized computer software utilized to calculate and report vote totals in elections.

It is apparent that the majority of legislators in Madison are poised to approve a "Voter ID" bill, a pricey solution in search of a problem.