



# Governor's continued attempts to disenfranchise voters warrant arrest

## **Statement of Alderman Ashanti Hamilton December 5, 2012**

If a man was to threaten someone else with bodily harm or death in this country, that man would be arrested, charged with any number of crimes and likely jailed. But I've found myself wondering, in light of recent events, that if the Governor of Wisconsin threatens to take away our residents' most fundamental rights—rights for which Americans have risked their bodies and even laid down their lives—then should not our Governor also be arrested and jailed?

The unfortunate fact is that while Governor Scott Walker's actions are without a doubt criminal in a moral sense, proving the Voter ID law he championed is statutorily illegal poses a more significant challenge. And while Wisconsinites can breathe a sigh of relief that this unjust law is currently and properly being held up in the courts, it's clear that the Governor and his allies are already gearing up for another assault on the fundamental liberties for which they espouse such concern.

Governor Walker said in recent comments to an audience in California that he would like to do away with Wisconsin's longstanding same-day registration rule. This rule allows voters who can prove they are residents to register and vote on Election Day, and is often cited as one of the reasons our state continues to be a nationwide leader in voter turnout.

I join Mayor Tom Barrett, City of Milwaukee Election Commissioner Neil Albrecht and municipal clerks around the state today in staunch opposition to this proposal. Like Governor Walker's attempt to institute Voter ID, this is a transparent effort to disenfranchise legal voters who are predominantly members of minority communities, senior citizens and young people.

It is clear beyond any doubt that it was a national Republican strategy in this last election to keep these people from voting. It's a strategy that is despicable, we've seen that it's a losing strategy, and I believe it's a crime against democracy.

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## **Ald. Hamilton Statement/ADD ONE**

But it seems that Governor Walker is hell-bent on suppressing the votes of constituents with whom his agenda is unpopular, rather than adopting policies that are less extreme. As a fellow elected official, this is deeply distressing to me. It's our job as public servants to expand access to the polls and protect the rights of our constituents. For the Governor to do otherwise is a blatant violation of his oath of office.

Much like his claims that Voter ID addresses a real and significant fraud problem, Governor Walker's claims that same-day registration places a burden on poll workers and municipal clerks have no grounding in fact. At polling places this past Election Day, the lines to register were invariably shorter than the lines to vote, and clerks statewide have rejected the Governor's notion that they are overwhelmed by the process.

More than 57,000 people registered to vote in Milwaukee this past Election Day. Governor Walker's proposal would strip every one of them of their rights, all in the name of "helping" clerks who don't want or need the help. It used to be that if elected officials engaged in this sort of sinister disenfranchisement, it was with some degree of shame and subterfuge. Now it seems they don't even bother to hide it!

Ours is a community that has come under siege on so many fronts—from public safety to unemployment, and high rates of incarceration to the quality of our education. But voter intimidation is illegal. And a thinly-veiled assault on our right to vote, I feel, is nothing short of criminal.