

March 1, 2011

**Re: Widespread opposition to Senate Bill 9
Requiring government-issued ID to obtain public benefits**

Dear Senators:

The full Senate may soon vote on Senate Bill 9, a bill requiring submission of government-issued ID as a condition of receiving a wide variety of public benefits. **We urge you to vote no on this bill.** This bill will tie up government programs, such as the Unemployment Compensation system, in expensive red tape, while accomplishing little or nothing. In addition, it will force thousands of Pennsylvanians to go without critical services while they wait for new government-issued ID.

Up to 800,000 U.S. citizens would likely be denied public benefits for which they are eligible because they lack government-issued ID. The bill makes most adults under age 65, and some seniors, ineligible for benefits if they cannot produce the proper ID. A study by New York University Law School's Brennan Center for Justice in November 2006 found that **11% of all U.S. citizens do not have government-issued ID**; 15% of citizens earning less than \$35,000 per year lack government-issued ID; and 25% of adult African-American citizens lack government-issued ID.¹

Moreover, ID can be difficult and time consuming to obtain: PennDOT requires a birth certificate and social security card to get a photo ID, but government ID is generally required to obtain a birth certificate or social security card. Families behind on their mortgages and struggling local businesses in need of customers cannot afford to wait for this Catch-22 to be resolved.

In 2006, Colorado passed a similar law to SB 9 that required all applicants for public benefits to submit government-issued ID. This requirement caused widespread hardship among the estimated 550,000 Coloradans who lack such ID.² And although its proponents claimed the law would save money, agencies reported that it cost \$2 million in the first year alone, with no identified savings.³ Following Colorado's embarrassing experience, no state legislature seeking to prevent immigrants from fraudulently receiving benefits has required all applicants to submit government-issued ID, with the exception of Arizona.

The problems with the bill would be most apparent in the Unemployment Compensation (UC) system. This bill would delay and deny benefits to Pennsylvanians. The UC

¹ Brennan Center, "Citizens Without Proof," available at http://www.brennancenter.org/page/-/d/download_file_39242.pdf.

² See, e.g., "Disabled Man Wins ID Bout," Denver Post, April 11, 2007, available at http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_5637737.

³ See "Colo. Immigration Law Falls Short of Goal," Denver Post, January 11, 2007, available at http://www.denverpost.com/ci_5081255.

system is not set up to review ID documents: all applications for UC are now submitted by telephone or on-line. **The Rendell administration estimated the cost of SB 9 at approximately \$20 million**, in substantial part because of the cost of adapting the UC system to review this new paperwork. This figure does not include the burdens to families as their UC benefits are delayed by this new red tape.

We urge you to oppose this bill, which will create red tape and barriers to service for Pennsylvanian citizens and legal immigrants without sufficient reason, and cost millions of dollars at a time that we can least afford it. For more information, please contact Michael Froehlich, Community Legal Services, at 215-981-3707 or mfroehlich@clsphila.org. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



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