

VOTER ID How could the proposed amendment impact the election process in rural areas?

Written by Kent Sulem & Abbey Bryduck, Greater Minnesota Advisory Panel Staff
Thursday, 09 August 2012 01:51



There are more questions than answers for local governments when it comes to implementation and associated costs of administering elections should the amendment pass in November.

This November, Minnesota residents will be asked to decide whether voters should be required to present valid, government-issued photographic proof of identity prior to casting a ballot. While it is not the job of local election officials to determine whether this concept is valid, it is the responsibility of all local units of government, ranging from the smallest township to the largest county, to be properly prepared to administer elections in compliance with all applicable laws.

In order to be fully prepared for the implementation of the proposed amendment, the Greater Minnesota Advisory Panel (GMAP), a voluntary association of representatives of rural townships, cities, counties, and school districts seeking to work with both the legislative and executive branches of the state government on rural concerns), believes it is important that local officials and voters understand the details and potential impact of what they are being asked to approve, and how local governments must prepare now even though the amendment has not yet been approved nor enabling legislation enacted.

VOTER ID How could the proposed amendment impact the election process in rural areas?

Written by Kent Sulem & Abbey Bryduck, Greater Minnesota Advisory Panel Staff
Thursday, 09 August 2012 01:51

If adopted, the amendment would require changes to how all elections conducted in the state are administered, including:

-In-person voters would need to present a valid, government-issued photographic identification prior to receiving a ballot;

-All voters, whether voting in person, casting an absentee ballot, or voting by mail ballot would be required to provide some sort of substantially equivalent proof of identification and eligibility prior to casting a ballot or having their ballot counted;

-In-person voters unable to provide photographic identification would need to vote using a new type of ballot known as a provisional ballot. Such voters would then need to provide the proper form of identification during some period of time after the election before their ballot could be counted.

GMAP understands that if the amendment is adopted, enabling legislation would still be needed to implement and thus it is not possible to know exactly how the proposed amendment will impact local governments. However, as representatives of rural Minnesota, GMAP has concerns about how the proposed amendment could impact the election process in rural areas, including the following:

-Uncertainty of how the "substantially equivalent" verification requirement will impact mail-balloting, absentee balloting, and same-day registration. Many rural communities rely on mail balloting due to sparse populations.

-Unknown administrative and fiscal burdens of new provisional ballot process. While the details will not be known until after the 2013 Legislature adopts enabling legislation, reviewing court cases and the 2011 voter ID bill which was vetoed, it is clear that voters casting a provisional ballot will have to have either a separate ballot or a separate means of securing their ballots, or both. This will require the printing of special ballots and/or security envelopes and the need to purchase secured ballot boxes to store provisional ballots separate from regular ballots. Some communities may find it necessary to hire extra election judges to oversee provisional ballots.

VOTER ID How could the proposed amendment impact the election process in rural areas?

Written by Kent Sulem & Abbey Bryduck, Greater Minnesota Advisory Panel Staff
Thursday, 09 August 2012 01:51

Provisional balloting may also increase work hours for election officers such as town and city clerks and the county auditors, as well as election judges, in order to process and store the special ballots. In addition, rural voters may have a harder time returning to provide further documentation, due to the distance between their residence and the polling official's location after the election.

-Extra training costs for election officials and judges to understand the new procedures. While exact numbers will not be known until the implementation statute is adopted, a fiscal note for the 2011 voter ID legislation indicated that the cost to local governments to implement the law for state elections would be approximately \$8.2 million. Such an expense would be a burden on rural communities unless the State were to pay for all implementation and increased ongoing administrative costs should the amendment pass.

Whether or not voters believe the impact and costs associated with the proposed amendment are worthwhile is a personal decision. Local election officials will do their jobs and administer any new requirements should the amendment be adopted and enabling legislation is passed during 2013 legislative session. However, because of the 2013 effective date, local governments must plan now for any possible changes including taking necessary steps to ensure an adequate budget to administer the changes. GMAP believes it is critical for local communities to take steps now to be ready should the amendment pass, and residents need to understand why these preparations and budgetary efforts are occurring so they can make an informed choice on the ballot question.

The Greater Minnesota Advisory Panel (GMAP) is a voluntary association of representatives of rural townships, cities, counties, and school districts seeking to work with both the legislative and executive branches of the state government on rural concerns.