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TO: Senate State Government Committee

FROM: Andy Hoover, Legislative Director

DATE: March 23, 2009

RE: OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 514

The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania has long been an advocate of access to the ballot box and the tearing down of barriers to voting. On Tuesday, the committee is scheduled to consider Senate Bill 514, which would require photo identification to vote. SB 514 creates barriers to the ballot box. On behalf of the 16,000 members of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, I urge you to please vote “no” on SB 514.

Americans’ interest in the democratic process is on the rise. Voter turnout has increased in recent election cycles, and in more than 30 states, voters have been able to participate in some form of early voting, either through open polling places or through no-excuse absentee balloting.

SB 514 would block Pennsylvanians’ access to the election process. A 2006 study by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University showed that 11 percent of Americans do not have government-issued identification. When that research was broken down by demographics, it showed the following:

- 15 percent of citizens who earn less than \$35,000 per year do not have government-issued ID
- 18 percent of citizens age 65 and older lack government-issued ID
- 25 percent of African-American adults do not have government-issued ID

In addition, it is common for persons with disabilities and domestic violence victims to not have identification.

If passed, SB 514 would disenfranchise a significant number of Pennsylvanians. Blocking access to the polls for the elderly, working poor, minorities, persons with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence is election reform of the worst kind.

In fact, ID to vote legislation has been successful this year in states with a history of disenfranchisement. Since the New Year, legislative bodies in Texas, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Tennessee have moved bills like SB 514. These states have a history of voter suppression and discrimination. Meanwhile, ID to vote bills have been rejected in Wyoming, Colorado, and Minnesota. Arkansas and Mississippi have also turned back this legislation.

In addition, SB 514 is a solution in search of a problem. No evidence exists that the kind of fraud that polling place ID would stop is occurring in the commonwealth. It is not necessary to block access to the ballot box for many Pennsylvanians to fix a problem that does not exist.

ACLU of Pennsylvania
Memo in opposition to SB 514
March 23, 2009

As Pennsylvanians' interest in the electoral process grows, now is the time to pass policies that make voting easier. SB 514 makes voting harder. Please vote "no" on this legislation.