



# **Manitoba Federation of Labour Submission to the Manitoba Legislative Standing Committee on Bill 27**

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*The Elections Amendment Act*

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**Manitoba Federation of Labour**

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## ***Bill 27: The Elections Amendment Act***

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL), Manitoba's central labour body, representing the interests of more than 100,000 unionized workers, opposes this government's plan to make our democracy less accessible by making it harder for a number marginalized Manitobans to vote in provincial elections. In effect, this Bill will make it harder to vote for Manitoban citizens who do not appear on the voters list and who already face a number of barriers to obtaining government issued identification (ID). A fair and equitable voting process is a hallmark of viable democracies. Unfortunately, all this Bill would do is make democracy harder to access for some of the most vulnerable in our province.

Currently in Manitoba, voters can confirm their identity by showing either one piece of photo ID or two pieces without photos like a Manitoba health card, Status Indian card, or mail addressed to their current address. And if neither piece of ID has a home address, they can sign a declaration as to where they live. This Bill would continue a number of these practices, but only if an individual appears on the voters list. It is woefully silent on how people who are left off the voters list will be able to vote if they are unable to produce the required identification.

For instance, while this Bill would continue to allow for individuals without the necessary documentation to be 'vouched for' by another resident of the same electoral division who has the required identification that is only if they appear on the voters list to begin with. We know that a variety of factors, like lack of stable housing and transient living situations, would potentially leave people off a voters list.

Access to ID is a substantial problem for many Manitobans, and it overwhelmingly impacts people who live in poverty, the working poor, the elderly, those living with disabilities, and those without a fixed address, including young people, students and those experiencing homelessness. An inability to afford the associated costs and

transient living situations are two main factors that impact the ability to obtain ID for many.

And as we are all too aware in this province, because of the experiences of the Sixties Scoop, many Indigenous people face challenges in obtaining a birth certificate, which makes it harder to get ID. Movement between First Nations reserves and other communities can also make it harder to access ID with a current, fixed address.

All Manitobans have the right to vote. Making it harder for some to vote is undemocratic, plain and simple.

A recent report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba details how lack of ID represents a critical barrier preventing low-income Manitobans from accessing government services they are entitled to, further marginalizing low-income Manitobans and deepening poverty. There is a need for this government to work on developing solutions to get appropriate ID into the hands of those Manitobans who face barriers to obtaining it. This government decided to scrap plans for an all-in-one MPI personal ID card, which would have helped to address some of these barriers by providing government issued photo ID and a health card in one card. So, at the same time as it is making it harder for those who face barriers to obtaining proper ID to vote, this government has also cancelled a tangible solution to help address some of these challenges.

Underlying documents required to obtain ID, like a birth certificate, cost money, representing a significant expense for low-income Manitobans. Evidence from the United States demonstrates that these types of voter suppression laws reduce voter turnout. A 2014 Government Accountability Office study found that strict photo ID laws reduce turnout by two to three percentage points.

Bill 27 is a solution in search of a problem. The Chief Electoral Officer of Manitoba has stated that voter fraud is not a concern in our province, clearly demonstrating that the current system works well to protect the legitimacy of Manitoban elections.

It represents another step towards making democracy less accessible to marginalized Manitobans. This Bill follows on the heels of The Elections Financing Amendment Act, which enables the wealthy to have more influence on our democracy by raising donation limits on contributions to political parties by 66 per cent, from \$3,000 to \$5,000. The limit will rise by the rate of inflation every year. At a time when other provinces, like British Columbia, are taking big money out of politics, this government is the only one making it easier for those with wealth to have a greater influence on our democracy. I think it's safe to say that most Manitobans don't have \$5,000 laying around under the mattress to donate to political parties. Raising the limit only serves wealthy donors who can now give even more to political parties, and receive even greater tax benefits as a result.

We urge the government to rethink this Bill, and consult widely to ensure that Manitobans who already face a number of socio-economic barriers are not disenfranchised simply because they do not have the required ID. We also recommend that this government revisit the plan to develop an all-in-one MPI personal ID card to provide Manitobans with greater convenience and access to photo ID, and to help to break down barriers for low-income and marginalized Manitobans. Everyone deserves to play a part in our democratic process, and one of the most fundamental ways to do that is by voting. We know that young, low-income, and Indigenous Manitobans are more likely to face challenges in obtaining ID. Making it harder for them to exercise their right to vote by putting further restrictions on them will only serve to make it more difficult for them to participate in our democracy.