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## Suit seeks broader use of Indian ID for voting

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The Minnesota Civil Liberties Union (MCLU) has challenged state voter registration requirements that it claims threaten to deprive many American Indians of their right to vote.

In a lawsuit against Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer, the MCLU said the state is violating federal law by not recognizing a tribal membership card as sufficient identification for Indians to register to vote anywhere in Minnesota on Election Day.

The state says that the card is sufficient ID only for Indians living on reservations, and that Indians living off reservations can use the same identification and residency documents available to non-Indians who want to register on Election Day.

Kiffmeyer said Thursday that the Legislature approved the limited use of tribal ID cards this year.

Speaking of the MCLU, she said, "It's very clear they don't like the law."

Kiffmeyer said the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) cited in the MCLU suit gave states considerable authority to decide how much identification is needed for registration.

The Secretary of State's Office conferred with Attorney General Mike Hatch on Thursday in preparing a response for a hearing scheduled today in U.S. District Court.

The lawsuit is the latest dispute over voter registration in the run-up to an election in which turnout could prove decisive. Republicans and their allies have warned that many of the people who turn up at polls may not be eligible to vote, while Democrats and their allies say they fear Republicans will mount challenges at the polls that will discourage participation by legitimate voters.

The MCLU suit named as plaintiffs the National Congress of American Indians and three Minnesota Indians -- two members of the Fond du Lac Ojibwe and a member of the Mille Lacs Ojibwe.

Bonnie Dorr-Charwood, the Mille Lacs member, said that she lives in south Minneapolis and that her only form of picture identification is a tribal ID card issued by the Mille Lacs band. The ID includes her current address and signature.

"She intends to try to register to vote at her polling place on Election Day, and to use her only photo identification to do so," the suit said.

The suit also noted that state laws allows people to provide additional information or documents to register on Election Day along with other photo IDs. For instance, the suit said, the state allows use of a passport together with a current utility bill that lists the voter's name and address.

Not allowing off-reservation Indians to use a tribal photo identification along with a utility bill to establish identify and residency off reservation could unfairly deprive many Indians of voting, the suit said.

As many as 32,000 American Indians in Minnesota live off-reservation in the greater St.Paul/Minneapolis area, and many have only a tribal identification card for government- issued ID, the suit said.

Kiffmeyer said the Legislature conferred with Indians when writing the state law. She said she heard that it approved use of the tribal ID cards on reservations in part to help reservation residents who do not have a driver's license or other forms of ID.

She also argued that the MCLU in its suit confused federal rules regarding mailed-in registrations with those involving registrations at the polls on the day of the election.

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