



House Elections Committee

May 23, 2023

Promote the Vote submits the below supplemental written testimony in support of HBs 4567, 4568, 4569, 4570, and 4594.

I. **PTV Supports HB 4567 Because It Eliminates Some Unwarranted Challenged Ballot Requirements and Helps Streamline the Electoral Process for Voters and Election Workers.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melanie Macey. I'm Policy Counsel with Promote the Vote, a coalition of nonpartisan organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting voting rights in Michigan. Today, I am here to thank Chair Tsernoglou and offer our support for House Bill 4567, which addresses two instances where clerks are required to process ballots as "challenged" for voters based upon how they verify their identity or residency.

The first instance relates to voters who apply for absentee ballots in person and who verify their identity using the affidavit of identity. In November 2022, Michigan voters voted overwhelmingly in favor of Proposal 2 of 2022. Among other things, Prop 2 enshrined in the Michigan Constitution a voter's right to "prove their identity when voting in person or applying for an absent voter ballot in person" either by presenting a photo ID or by executing an affidavit of identity.

In spite of the constitutional right to prove one's identity by executing an affidavit of identity, Michigan law requires clerks to prepare as challenged those absentee voter ballots obtained in person by voters who prove their identity via affidavit. This means that voters exercising a constitutional right nevertheless must vote a challenged ballot. This result simply does not make sense, and HB 4567 would ensure that these voters may cast a regular ballot.

Similarly, all voters who register in the 14 days leading up to an election must provide proof of residency, that is, a document with their name and current address in the city or township where they live. Acceptable forms of proof of residency include a Michigan driver's license or state ID card, a utility bill, a bank statement, a paycheck, a government check, or any government document. For some reason, however, Michigan Election law provides that those using certain forms of proof of residency must vote a challenged ballot. Individuals with an out-

of-state driver's license who prove residency with a utility bill, for example, are treated differently under this law than those with a Michigan driver's license. Again, this provision simply does not make sense, and HB 4567 would remove it from the code, allowing those who prove their residency using any legally permissible method to vote a regular ballot.

Removing the requirement that clerks and poll workers process these ballots as challenged will improve the electoral process, both for voters and for election workers. For voters, having their ballot marked as challenged when they have legally verified their identity and residence can be confusing and upsetting. For election workers, like clerks and poll workers, spending time marking a ballot as challenged and explaining the issue to voters is time-consuming and can be frustrating. HB 4567 will streamline the process and reduce the potential for confusion or errors. Election workers can spend more time on other election administration tasks and more quickly process voters, which will mean a smoother electoral process for voters as well.

Election law is complicated enough, and I'd again like to thank Representative Tsernoglou for introducing this bill, which eliminates needless complications and will simplify the electoral process for both election workers and voters. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer questions.

II. PTV Supports HB 4568 Because It Will Instantly Increase Access to the Ballot for a Number of Historically Disenfranchised Communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melanie Macey. I'm Policy Counsel with Promote the Vote, a coalition of nonpartisan organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting voting rights in Michigan. Today, I am here to thank Representative Whitsett for bringing forth a bill addressing the ban on paid rides to the polls and to advocate for its recommendation. **This simple and straightforward change will instantly increase access to the ballot for a number of historically disenfranchised communities, and it requires only striking one line from the election code.**

Current Michigan law is an outlier in its prohibition against paid rides to the polls. In other states, nonprofit organizations and individuals can set up safe and reliable transportation on election day that covers the costs of getting voters to the polls. In other states, popular rideshare services like Uber or Lyft can offer free or discounted rides for voters headed to the polls. **In other states, voters can cross "transportation" off of the list of obstacles to casting their ballots. It's time for Michigan to catch up.**

Michigan is the only state that imposes this ban on paid rides to the polls, and there's simply no reason for us to be such an outlier. Michiganders who face transportation barriers, such as voters with disabilities, seniors, college students, and lower-income individuals, are disproportionately affected, as they heavily rely on accessible transportation options to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

The Michigan legislature has the ability to bring greater equity to opportunities for civic participation and align our state with the rest of the country with a single stroke of the pen. By striking a single line from our state's election law, we can remove this barrier and ensure that all eligible voters have equal access to transportation options when casting their votes.

Eliminating the ban on paid rides to the polls is crucial to protect the voting rights of Michigan residents. It will help address disparities in access to transportation for voters, particularly those who are most vulnerable. I thank Rep Whitsett for bringing this change forward and urge this committee to take action and support the repeal of this ban, bringing Michigan in line with the rest of the nation. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer questions.

III. PTV Supports HB 4569 Because It Streamlines the Registration Process and Positions Young People for Early Civic Engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melanie Macey. I'm Policy Counsel with Promote the Vote, a coalition of nonpartisan organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting voting rights in Michigan. And of particular relevance today, I'm also the mom of two Michigan teenagers, one of whom turns 16 next month. I'm here to thank Rep. Coffia for her work in bringing forward House Bill 4569, which would create pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds in Michigan, and to encourage the committee to recommend it for passage.

Following a model used by 15 states, this bill makes a simple, but important change to Michigan's election law. Under current Michigan law, people can only register to vote starting at 17-and-a-half-years-old, but not earlier. This bill extends that registration window in an important way, allowing 16-year-olds and remaining 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote.

Under this bill, a 16 year-old can complete a registration application just like anyone else. But rather than being officially registered, they would be designated on the rolls as "pre-registered" to vote. When they turn 17-and-a-half, that pre-registration would automatically mature into a regular registration, without the need for any further action.

This change significantly expands the opportunity to register and engage young voters. With pre-registration, more young voters can register to vote during a high school registration drive, or when they get their first driver's license, or by applying online. Instead of a six-month window to register before turning 18, teenagers will have a full two year period.

For example, consider the effect of pre-registration on a high school registration drive. Rather than just focusing on students who are over 17-and-a-half, a school administrator can provide registration forms to the entire senior and junior classes. Anyone between 16 and 17-and-a-half would simply be pre-registered to vote.

This change also allows voter registration to be integrated into high school civics education. As students learn about the electoral process, and their rights and responsibilities as voters, they can take the next step of joining the voter rolls and be ready to vote when Election Day comes. **This early exposure to the democratic process will encourage a sense of civic duty and encourage lifelong engagement in the political arena.**

Fifteen states and Washington, D.C., already permit pre-registration beginning at age 16. These include states across the political spectrum, ranging from New York and California to Louisiana, Utah, and Florida. In these states, pre-registration has resulted in significantly increased civic participation among young voters. And Michigan teenagers are ready for the change. I just came back from my daughter's class DC trip, and I was floored by these teens' background in politics and history and their interest and curiosity in how the government works. Our teenagers in Michigan are ready to engage!

With this bill, the legislature has the opportunity to engage more young voters to actively participate in the democratic process. We can reinforce the idea that civic participation is a lifelong commitment, starting from an early age. I'd again like to thank Rep. Coffia for bringing this excellent draft, and I strongly urge you to support this bill. I'm happy to answer any questions.

IV. PTV Supports HB 4570 Because It Ensures that the Constitutional Right to Vote by Absentee Ballot is Accessible to All Eligible Voters.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melanie Macey. I'm Policy Counsel with Promote the Vote, a coalition of nonpartisan organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting voting rights in Michigan. Today, I am here to thank Representative Rogers for sponsoring House Bill 4570, which not only enshrines Michigan's existing online absentee ballot

application system in our election law, but also expands the system to make it available to those Michigan voters without Michigan driver's licenses or state IDs. **All Michigan voters have a constitutional right to vote by absentee ballot. And this bill is an important step in making the exercise of that right more accessible and convenient.**

By providing an online platform for registered electors to request an absent voter ballot, we empower voters with a user-friendly and efficient means of participating in our democracy.

The draft bill's dual options for providing a verified signature are an adept way of handling a complicated issue, one that is already successfully used in other states. It enables electors to use their previously-stored digital signature in the driver's license database, streamlining the process for those who have a driver's license or state ID. Electors who do not have such a stored digital signature can upload a photograph of their physical handwritten signature to the online absent voter ballot application. **This provision ensures that all registered voters, even those without a driver's license or state ID, have the opportunity to use the online application and exercise their right to vote securely and conveniently by absentee ballot.**

House Bill 4570 provides consistency and clarity in our election procedures. By standardizing the online application, we promote transparency and uniformity across the state, ensuring that every eligible voter has equitable access to absentee voting. Furthermore, this bill caters to the needs of diverse communities, including those who face physical limitations, transportation challenges, or time constraints that make online interactions preferable to interactions in-person or by mail. **By expanding access to online absent voter ballot applications, we facilitate broader participation in our democratic process, enhancing voter engagement and representation.**

I'd again like to thank Representative Rogers for introducing this bill, which ensures that all registered voters have a secure and convenient opportunity to use an online application to request and absent voter ballot. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer questions.

V. PTV Supports HB 4594 Because It Will Reduce Disenfranchisement by Quickly and Clearly Alerting a Voter to an Issue with Their Absentee Ballot.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 4594 today, and thank you to Representative Wegela for bringing this bill forward.

My name is Melanie Macey, and I am Policy Counsel at Promote the Vote. In 2022, Promote the Vote partnered with more than thirty organizations to propose and pass an amendment to our state constitution that enhances election security and protects the right of every eligible Michigander to vote. Thanks to the diligent and thorough work of the House and Senate elections committee members, bills that implement the provisions of Proposal 2 of 2022 are now being introduced and passed. Promote the Vote was delighted to see SB 259, the first such bill, passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor earlier this month.

A key goal of Proposal 2 was to ensure robust voter access to absentee voting, and **HB 4594 implements one of the rights granted to absentee voters in Article 2, Section 4(1)(i) of the constitution: the right to a state-funded system to track submitted absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots.**

HB 4594 requires the Secretary of State to establish this electronic ballot tracking system and identifies the information that the system must provide to the voter at every step of the process, from receipt of the ballot application by the local clerk to approval of the ballot for tabulation. As dictated by the constitution, the bill requires that voters who opt in be notified when their ballot application is received by their clerk and accepted; when their ballot is mailed to them or, in the case of military and overseas voters, electronically transmitted to them; and when their completed ballot is received back by the local clerk and approved for tabulation. It requires that voters be notified if their ballot application is deficient in some way, what the problem is, and how to fix it, and that they be notified again when the problem is cured. Similarly, the bill requires that the voter be notified if there is a problem with their ballot itself, what the problem is and how to fix it, and that the voter be notified again when the ballot is approved for tabulation.

A significant advantage of this tracking system is that it will quickly and clearly let a voter know if they are at risk of not successfully voting by absentee ballot, and what they need to do to make sure they can successfully vote. For example, if a voter forgets to sign their ballot application or ballot return envelope, or if their signature does not sufficiently match their signature on file, or if they send the application or ballot application to the wrong municipality, the ballot tracking system notifies the voter immediately after the issue is identified by the clerk. The system also tells the voter how to fix the problem and the deadline for doing so. This opportunity to be timely notified about ballot application or ballot problems and how to cure them is critical, because voters sometimes make mistakes, mail sometimes is delayed or lost,

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and clerk's offices sometimes get overwhelmed by the volume of applications and returned ballots.

Promote the Vote is well aware of voters' interest in getting complete information about the status of their absentee ballots, and the difficulties they sometimes face in accessing that information. In 2020 and 2022, the 866-OUR-VOTE non-partisan election protection hotline received over a hundred calls from Michigan voters about the status of their absentee ballot applications and ballots. Sometimes it was possible to help these voters locate the information on the Secretary of State's website, but often it was not. HB 4594 will make thorough information about the status of absentee ballots much more easily accessible to voters.

Letting voters know where their ballot application and ballot is at all times will reassure them that their votes will be counted and help tamp down misinformation. And this tracking system, because it is automatic, will reduce the time that clerks and their staff spend answering phone calls and emails from absentee voters regarding the whereabouts of their application or ballot, and what to do if there is a problem. HB 4584 is also a huge step forward for ensuring that voters are not disenfranchised when they make a mistake with their ballot application or ballot. Promote the Vote strongly supports passage of the bill and looks forward to making voters aware of the ballot tracking system when it is fully operational.

Thank you again.