



TO: Clerk Sleeper, Michigan House of Representatives

FROM: Barbara Smith Warner on behalf of National Vote at Home Institute

DATE: June 7, 2023

RE: Testimony in support of HB 4700

National Vote at Home Institute is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to increase voters' access to, use of, and confidence in voting at home. In addition to my official role as Executive Director, I am testifying today both as a resident of Oregon, where we created the first vote at home system and have used it successfully for over twenty years, and as a former legislator who served in the Oregon House (2014-2022).

HB 4700 will establish a system of signature matching and curing for absentee ballots. Making sure returned ballots are from legitimate voters is a core part of elections administration. In states like Oregon and Colorado, where all elections are fully conducted through mailed-out ballots, matching the signature on the ballot return envelope has been found to be extremely reliable. According to the official US Election Assistance Commissions EAVS 2020 report, both states see initial acceptance rates of submitted ballots in the very high 90's percent every election.

This level of assurance comes from a few best practices, which include rigorous training of signature judges; having two levels of signature verification (an initial pass to accept or flag, followed by a bi-partisan second team for additional scrutiny); and having multiple signatures on file (including voter registration, prior ballot envelopes, DMV records and more).

The curing process addresses the need for all voters to have their ballots count, even if they sometimes don't follow the instructions exactly. Rather than penalizing voters, there are many options to allow them to cure their mistake, in a reasonable amount of time, and retain their right to vote in that election. Election officials take great pride in their roles as guardians of our democracy, and they too want every legitimate vote to be counted.

VOTE at HOME

Ballot curing processes, which usually involve contacting the voter and then requiring them to provide additional verification as to their identity and the fact that they voted (like a copy of a photo ID), both maintains election security and also sustains the voters' intent to participate.

An additional policy issue that will need to be addressed is how rapidly to notify voters if they need to cure their returned ballot, and how much time they should have after Election Day to do so, so as not to disadvantage later arriving ballots. We believe a best practice is to notify voters within 24 hours of discovery of the need to cure, and allow seven days after Election Day for them to cure the issue.

A robust signature verification and matching process, coupled with a robust curing option, is good for Michigan voters, and we urge your support of HB 4700.