



STATE OF MICHIGAN
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
LANSING

Submitted as testimony before the House Subcommittee on General Government

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Chairperson Huizenga and distinguished subcommittee members:

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you. I would have been pleased to testify today, but could not do so on such short notice, nor could the Director of the Bureau of Elections, as he is on furlough today as part of the statewide cost-cutting measure.

Thank you also for taking up the important subject of how to best administer elections that draw higher rates of absent-voter ballots. This is a critical subject that my office has been working on for many months, due to the Promote the Vote constitutional amendment passed by voters shortly before I took office that expanded the right to vote by mail to all registered voters.

We gained tremendous insight into the process in both the March 10 presidential primary and the May 5 local elections. The former drew double the absentee ballots cast in the 2016 presidential primary, and the latter, held primarily by mail, saw 99% of ballots cast by mail or deposited in dropboxes. I visited voting locations on May 5 and despite the fact that the election turnout was double the average for May elections, I found them clean, calm and safe. Election workers were prepared with the personal protective equipment provided by the Bureau of Elections, and were proud to be serving democracy during the coronavirus pandemic.

In both elections, clerks and election workers showed their tremendous professionalism, integrity and skill, carrying out safe, accurate and secure elections despite new legal parameters and voter behavior. They demonstrated that we have the tools and the talent we need to carry out elections successfully through this year.

That said, there are numerous ways that the legislature could support clerks and voters ahead of the August 4 State Primary elections and November 3 General elections. I have shared many of these ideas with legislators previously, but am happy to do so in this venue as well. They include:

- Enable election workers to process – but not count – absentee ballots prior to Election Day, as is done in at least 18 other states. Many clerks say ideally they would have three full additional days and be allowed to do all but tally the ballots. This would better enable them to deliver results on Election Night, and enable more election workers to be deployed to voting locations on Election Day.
- Require clerks to contact voters when they receive an absent voter ballot with a signature that does not match the signature on the voter's application and/or registration. This

guidance is currently provided by the Bureau of Elections, but a requirement in statute would be provide assurance to voters and be in the best interest of our elections.

- Allow ballots to be counted that are postmarked by Election Day but received thereafter. This would give voters the same flexibility and clarity they have filing their taxes, and could resolve a lawsuit that has been filed on this very issue.

Again, I thank you for the work you are doing to support our elections in this unprecedented time. I hope that your conversation today is productive.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Benson