

**Testimony of Samuel Derheimer
The Pew Charitable Trusts**

**House Elections and Ethics Committee
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I am Samuel Derheimer with the Election Initiatives team at The Pew Charitable Trusts. Thank you for the invitation to discuss an important upgrade to Michigan's election system.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is pleased to support HB 5548 and HB 5549. Pushing the voter registration process online will inject integrity and efficiency into Michigan's voter rolls.

Arizona was the first state to offer electronic voter registration back in 2002. Though it took six years before Washington became the second in 2008, the rest of nation then quickly followed suit. Today, 38 states and the District of Columbia—including Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin—either have active systems or have passed laws and are in the process of building a system in time for the 2018 election. In total, more than 170,000,000 eligible Americans can register to vote without a paper form.

So many states have adopted electronic voter registration because the applications received online result in more accurate records at a lower processing cost.

By removing the primary causes of data errors—such as sloppy handwriting on paper forms and third-party data entry—voter records will be more accurate, reducing potential problems at the polls and limiting opportunities for fraud. In 2009, election officials in Maricopa County, Arizona (Phoenix) found that voter registration applications received on paper were up to five times more likely to result in an error in the voter's official record than applications received electronically.ⁱ

And by severely reducing the primary cost drivers of the registration process—paper, printing, postage, and manual data entry—voter registration will cost less.

In Maricopa County, the average cost to process a paper application was \$0.83, while applications received online cost only \$0.03, on average.ⁱⁱ That single county reported nearly \$1.4 million in savings from online voter registration during the four-year period between 2008-2012.

In 2013, Colorado performed an exhaustive study of the costs associated with online voter registration. The Secretary of State found that paper applications cost about \$1.06 to process, while electronic voter registration transactions cost only \$0.35. While most of the savings came at the county level, overall the state reported over \$565,000 in total statewide savings from April of 2010 through July of 2013.ⁱⁱⁱ

Removing paper from the registration process will also strengthen the integrity of Michigan's elections. Because online applicants in most states must provide a Driver's License or state ID number that is checked one-to-one against the voter's file on record with the state—as is proposed in Michigan—citizens who register to vote electronically go through additional identity verification beyond that applied to those who register with paper.

After the adoption of online voter registration in Indiana, US Representative Todd Rokita, who was severing as Secretary of State at the time, touted the improved integrity Hoosiers should expect from an electronic registration system, "Giving our citizens access to an online registration tool also helps local election administrators better serve voters and should cut their costs, all while enhancing accessibility, accuracy and security."^{iv}

Representative Rokita was later echoed by Louisiana Secretary of State Tom Schedler who, in comments during a summit hosted by the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC), said, “Online voter registration is one of the best things we’ve done.”^v

To ensure voters’ information remains private and protected, states have commonly employed security measures such as data encryption, audit logs, CAPTCHA, and secure networks.^{vi} Further, online registration systems can flag IP addresses from which unusual traffic originates for investigation. These security measures cannot be employed with paper forms.

And it’s important to note that online voter registration systems do not give a political advantage to either major party. The data indicate that voters who register online tend to relate very closely to a state’s pre-existing registered voter population when accounting for political party preference. For example, in Colorado in 2014, both major parties claimed approximately 30 percent shares of all voters in the state, with the rest affiliated with minor parties or no party. When only those voters who registered online were separated out, both parties took 29 percent shares of that group.^{vii} Neither party gained an advantage.

Online voter registration can improve the accuracy and integrity of Michigan’s election system, while saving taxpayer money and providing a secure and convenient path to register to vote.

Because of these benefits, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA), chaired by the chief campaign lawyers from the Obama and Romney 2012 Presidential campaigns, recommended that all states adopt online voter registration.^{viii} In an official response to the final report from the PCEA, the Republican National Lawyers Association echoed support for online voter registration.^{ix}

Your citizens are looking to interact with their government through the technology they use in their everyday lives. Pew commends Michigan’s interest in improving the access and integrity of your voter registration system by considering joining the large majority of states that will be offering online voter registration to their citizens in 2018.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee.

ⁱ The Brennan Center for Justice: *The Case for Voter Registration Modernization*, 2013. <http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Case%20Voter%20Registration%20Modernization.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Matt A. Barreto, Bonnie Glaser, Karin Mac Donald, Loren Collingwood, Francisco Pedraza, Barry Pump: *Online Voter Registration: Case Studies in Arizona and Washington*, April 1, 2011. <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/0001/01/01/online-voter-registration>

ⁱⁱⁱ Colorado Secretary of State. *Colorado’s Online Voter Registration: Cost Savings Analysis*, November 20, 2013.

^{iv} Indiana Secretary of State press release, “Indiana to Begin Offering Online Voter Registration This Week,” June 29, 2010.

^v Louisiana Secretary of State Tom Schedler, public comments made during presentation to the US Election Assistance Commission, September 8, 2016.

^{vi} The Pew Charitable Trusts: *Understanding Online Voter Registration*, January 2014.

^{vii} Presentation by Judd Choate, State Election Director, Colorado Secretary of State’s office, “Election Administration: New Research and Developments,” The Pew Charitable Trusts, June 26, 2015.

^{viii} Presidential Commission on Election Administration: *The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration*. <http://www.supportthevoter.gov/>

^{ix} Republican National Lawyers Association: *RNLA Response to the Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration*. <http://www.rnla.org/pecaresponse.pdf>