

Michigan Election Reform Alliance  
Box 981246, Ypsilanti, MI 48198



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House Standing Committee on Elections and Ethics

Rep. Aaron Miller, Chair

RE: HB 5548 & 5549, Elections; registration; online voter registration; allow  
HB 5644, procedure to "spoil" an absent voter ballot, require use of paper ballots  
HB 5646, maintenance of the statewide qualified voter file  
HB 5669, define identification for election purposes

Thank you for considering changes in election law to improve administration and ease of voting. The bills regarding online voter registration though are ill advised and should not be adopted. There is no such thing as a secure Internet portal for a voter database. Every computer system is designed by people and can be hacked and compromised by other people. The 21 states whose voter databases were probed by Russian hackers in 2016, according to the FBI, provide positive proof of this vulnerability. Michigan was not one of the states hacked though, primarily because we do not have online registration. The complexity of any system designed to collect and verify numerous points of data online is ripe for errors and manipulation.

Also, remote registration methods are incomplete. Like mail-in applications, online web forms as provided by HB 5548 & 5549 do not constitute a valid and complete registration. Under Michigan Law and provisions of the federal Help America Vote Act, a person voting for the first time after mailing in an application must still appear in person at the polling place and give their written signature before a sworn election official. These bills only require showing proof of ID. Without a valid, witnessed master signature on file with the local Clerk, as Michigan Election Law requires, the security of our elections is compromised. The voter's signature is the Gold Standard for voter identification, and the election day signature must be matched to the master signature. There is no master photo of electronic signatures on file for matching the photo ID presented at the polling place, so a fake ID is easy to misrepresent.

A better way to improve the process is to allow election day registration. The Michigan Election Reform Alliance has supported the elimination of arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to voting since its founding. Under Michigan law, valid voter registration requires that a citizen appear in person and give their written signature before a sworn registration official. This process protects the integrity of the election system but also makes it difficult for many Michigan residents to register in time to qualify under the 30 day deadline before each election. The most effective solution, one that preserves both election integrity and voter access, is for Michigan to join the growing number of

states (15) that permit election day registration. Election day registration guarantees that voters will be registered before a sworn official without incurring any delay in their ability to cast a ballot.

Another option to consider is legislation to enact automatic voter registration, which nine states and the District of Columbia have already approved. Fifteen other states have introduced automatic registration proposals so far this year, as this reform has been shown to dramatically increase registration rates.

(<https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/automatic-voter-registration>).

Finally, the assertion by the House Fiscal Agency that these two bills would have “little or no cost to the Department of State” is questionable. New or modified computer programs are notorious for cost overruns and glitches. An implementation cost analysis by the Secretary of State should be required.

HB 5644 is a good bill. Requiring paper ballots is the only way to properly verify votes when auditing or recounting. And the right to spoil an absent voter ballot is already allowed, so specifying the procedures in law asserts that right.

The HB 5646 is problematic. Federal codes restrict the distribution of their information. In 2014, legislative rules governing the Social Security Death Index changed so records from the most recent 3 year period are not available. Clerks already get their County death records monthly but have no way to track people who go to another state and die. So the bottom line is, getting federal death records will not speed the updating of voter registration records.

The requirement to participate in a multistate voter registration status program should be optional until a reliable, secure program is developed. The Secretary of State already participates in the multistate Cross Check system, which is notoriously inaccurate and leads to many errors.

HB 5669 is a good bill. It clarifies what “identification for election purposes” is, and most importantly, preserves the option of signing an affidavit in lieu of presenting ID, and allows for the use of Provisional Ballots.

Please visit our web site at [MichiganElectionReformAlliance.org](http://MichiganElectionReformAlliance.org) for more information. Thank you for addressing these issues and listening to our recommendations.

Authors:

Will White, a member of the MERA Council and Chair of the Legislative Committee.

Jan BenDor, Statewide Coordinator and Founding Member of the Michigan Election Reform Alliance, Accredited Michigan Election Administrator, and retired Deputy Clerk.