



THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS

M I C H I G A N

EDUCATING AND ADVOCATING FOR RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

Testimony of Sue Smith, President, League of Women Voters of Michigan

**Before the Michigan Senate
Local Government and Elections Committee
November 2, 2011**

Good afternoon. My name is Sue Smith and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. I would like to take this opportunity to address the League's interests in election issues and to comment on some of the proposed bills.

In the area of campaign finance, the League supports timely and full disclosure of all election spending along with strong enforcement and penalties to deter violations of the law. We are concerned about the role of money in elections and the perception that policymakers are beholden to campaign contributors, which contributes to cynicism about government. We believe that unregulated independent expenditures, primarily in the form of television ads, are a priority for campaign finance reform.

The League of Women Voters believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. The League has long supported policies that make voting more convenient and accessible, including no reason absentee voting, early voting, and additional opportunities to register to vote.

Michigan's voting laws need to be updated to serve today's busier, more complex world and fit the needs of today's families. We believe that every registered voter should have the option to vote absentee. Most of Michigan's voters **do not** have this option.

We think that measures to improve election administration should be evaluated in terms of their necessity, costs, and how they affect voters' rights. It is within this context that I present the League's comments on SB 751 and SB 754. I want to specifically address the requirements pertaining to voter identification and third party voter registration organizations.

*** The photo ID requirement contained in both bills is not necessary** because it duplicates the current methods used to verify a voter's identity.

The Qualified Voter File is currently used to verify the identity of a person applying for an absentee ballot. The signature of the applicant is compared to the digitized signature in the Qualified Voter File. The League supports this method of voter identification. Current law also provides for verifying voter identity at the polls, rather than at the time of registration.

The additional identification requirements of SB 751 and SB 754 do not improve upon these current methods. In fact, the bills create two classes of registrants and absentee voters: those who apply by mail do not have to show photo ID; those who apply in person do.

*** The laws will be costly to implement.** Although the additional identification requirements are not as extensive as measures adopted in some other states, they will come at a cost. Other

states that have implemented photo ID laws have had to spend millions to educate voters about the new requirements, to provide ID to those who cannot afford it, to re-train elections officials, and to defend legal challenges.

Registration and training of third party organizations that provide voter registration will also require additional State resources.

- **Numerous studies have found that the rare cases of voter impersonation are almost never something that could be prevented by a photo identification law.** Photo ID laws address impersonation of another registered voter at the polls, which is an exceedingly rare form of voter fraud. The cost of these laws cannot be justified by the results they are likely to achieve.
- **The proposed laws place burdens on citizens who want to vote and organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, that work to engage citizen participation in elections.** People who lack the required identification when they apply for an absentee ballot, will have their ballot challenged under SB 751. A person who registers to vote in-person, expecting to be able to vote absentee, may be required to go to the polls on Election Day. We should be making voting more convenient and accessible for people who want to vote, not more difficult.

Throughout its history the League of Women Voters has registered people to vote. Yet, under SB 754, organizations such as ours would be required to register with the Secretary of State's office and participate in training in order to be certified. The League opposes mandatory registration and certification of third party registration agencies because it places burdens on civic organizations and restricts voter registration opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.