



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

MICHIGAN

EDUCATING AND ADVOCATING FOR RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

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Proposed Election Law Creates Barriers to Voting

Many legitimate voters will face new hurdles to voting this year, if proposed changes to Michigan's voter identification requirements pass the Legislature. The Senate Committee on Local Government and Elections approved a bill today – HB 5061 – that imposes stricter photo ID requirements for in-person absentee voting. The bill now moves to the Senate floor for a vote.

The proposed bill requires a person to show a government-issued photo ID when voting absentee at a clerk's office. The League of Women Voters, AARP Michigan, ACLU, and several other groups, oppose the bill because many eligible voters don't have this type of ID and will have difficulty getting it. The voting rights organizations say that Michigan already has strong election laws and voter identification requirements that work very well.

"This measure does not improve election integrity but instead adds unnecessary requirements that create barriers to voting," says Sue Smith, President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. "There is no evidence of voter impersonation in our elections and, therefore, no need for additional scrutiny of voters' identity."

Currently, voters can provide a range of documents to prove identity and eligibility to vote including, but not limited to, photo ID. This approach meets federal standards. The voter's signature is used to confirm identity and is more reliable and unchanging than a photo.

Even the Secretary of State acknowledges that voter fraud is not a problem. A recent audit of the Bureau of Elections (BOE) found records indicating that dead or incarcerated persons had voted. In response, the BOE said, "in every instance, where it appears that a deceased or incarcerated person voted and local records were available, a clerical error was established as the reason for the situation." Notably, the agency did not mention stricter voter identification methods among the actions they planned to take to address the problems.

An estimated 10 percent of voting-age Americans do not have a government-issued photo ID, an indication that more than 700,000 of Michigan citizens could be affected by the legislation. Elderly, minority, low-income and young adult voters are more likely than others to lack photo ID. The time and expense of obtaining the required ID can be prohibitive. An official record of birth does not exist for some people.

"No citizen should be denied the opportunity to vote because of unnecessary laws," says Smith.

The bill is part of a package of measures supported by Secretary of State Ruth Johnson. Additional photo ID requirements for in-person voter registration, regulation of civic groups that register voters, and citizenship verification measures are pending in the House.

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