

To: Michigan House of Representatives,
Standing Committee on Ethics and Elections
Hearing: HB 4373 and HB 4374 (Warren)
December 2, 2009
Testimony of Nancy Bedell, Michigan Election Reform Alliance.Org
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Thank you for giving citizens an opportunity to speak on behalf of the proposed bills, which would change the requirement in Michigan that the address on the Qualified Voter File (QVF) and the drivers' license be the same.

I am Nancy Bedell from Grand Rapids Township, a citizen interested and involved in voting issues for many years. I also work with the Michigan Election Reform Alliance.Org, for which Philip Shepard has testified here today. In addition I have helped to reestablish a Grand Rapids chapter of the League of Women Voters which conducted a get-out-the vote campaign in the city in 2007.

In 2004 as a Deputy Clerk registering voters in Kent County in a nonpartisan capacity, I discovered that in addition to registering voters I spent more than half of my time educating people on the other intricacies of election law. I discovered that election law complexities often discourage voting. Roger's Law or the requirement in Michigan that the address on the Qualified Voter File be the same as the driver's license address seems to discourage voting especially for young people who change residences often. Young people told me they had avoided registering on campus when they learned they had to change their driver's license address.

In the past year our local voting group, Grand Rapids Coalition for Voting Reform, which I help to lead, has studied voter issues in the City of Grand Rapids. We have trained and provided non-partisan Election Challengers in several city precincts in 2006. Now we are focusing on college student registration and voting. However, because the Coalition has not been able to meet to have input into my statement I do not speak for that group; I speak only for myself in this testimony.

There are several barriers for college students to begin and continue voting: first time voting in person for mail-in registrations discourages their voting. Since young people easily use the computer many would prefer to register on-line. However, if they do so, they cannot vote absentee the first time they vote unless they register on campus. They may not wish to change their driver's license address because they carry health or auto insurance with their parents, which requires the "home" address. Students who prefer to register at their "home" address often go to college away from home not having registered there before arriving on campus. Secretary of State offices are not easily accessible to them. No one alerts them to the advantage of registering in person before coming to campus, so they can vote the first time absentee. Students arrive at school in August not able to return home to register before the voter registration deadline in October. Then they learn that if they register to vote on campus their driver's license

address must change according to current Michigan law. Some really wish to vote on campus because they have become involved in local issues, or if their “home“ is out of state, they do not wish to change their driver’s license address. They may fail to register rather than change their driver’s license address. The requirement of Roger’s Law is just another of several reasons that students don’t register and vote in large numbers.

I quote here two pieces of research relating to the youth vote. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) studied youth voting in 2004 and found that the highest percentage of youth voted when registered on campus, 8-10% higher than those registered at home. Thus, making it easy to register on campus but keeping their “home” driver’s license address would probably encourage more student voting.

The Pew Center for the People and the Press in their survey of the Next Generation (ages 18-24) distributed October, 2006 noted that, despite the 12% rise in voting by this age group between 2000 and 2004 these young people “feel removed from the political process. Only about four-in-ten agree with the statement: ‘It’s my duty as a citizen to always vote.’” In order to keep the number of young voters rising, we need to make the process more user-friendly. Changing Roger’s Law would encourage students to vote and be involved in the communities where they live as college students. Allowing them to have a local voting address on the QVF while keeping a driver’s license address at “home” would undoubtedly increase their participation.

For this reason I strongly urge the passage of HR 4373 and HR 4374 by the Michigan legislature.