

October 22, 2013

House Standing Committee on Elections and Ethics
Rep. Lisa Posthumus Lyons, Chair
RE: HB 4878, Elections; polling places; super voter precincts



Thank you for considering changes in election law to improve administration and ease of voting. Consolidation of electoral functions between Counties and Townships may have some benefits, but only if it is determined at the local level and restricted to cooperation on a voluntary basis. However, there are several other issues in this proposed legislation which may be problematic.

The use of Super Precincts in convenient locations, while a good idea in theory, is not feasible given the current state of the Qualified Voter File (QVF). Maintenance of the QVF is not done in real time, but only updated on a nightly basis.

This presents the possibility of duplicate voting. A voter who casts a ballot at a Super Precinct could travel to the usual, proper precinct and vote again, as there is presently no way for a Super Precinct to notify the proper precinct that this particular voter has already voted unless each precinct is called or emailed with that information when each ballot is cast.

Another problem with Super Precincts is that because of multiple ballots for different districts they typically use electronic voting equipment like touch screens (Direct Recording Electronic or DRE's), which are vulnerable to hacking and cannot be physically audited to verify results. (Professional hacker Roger Johnston revealed "How I Hacked An Electronic Voting Machine" What do you need to rig an election? A basic knowledge of electronics and \$30 worth of Radio Shack gear. Posted 11-05-2012 at popsci.com)

And although the Department of State does not expect significant costs associated with this bill, they should still be quantified. In Colorado, additional equipment for the proposed super precincts was estimated to cost roughly \$1.3 million in 2007 (OurColoradoNews.com). Texas introduced Super Precincts in 2006, yet so far only 8 of the 254 counties have chosen to participate. It may be instructive to find out why. In North Carolina, Super Precincts (aka Vote Centers or Mega Precincts) were controversial and rife with problems when introduced. Computer problems and long lines were common on election day. See more details at <http://www.ncvoter.net/votecenters.html>.

In short, while theoretically Super Precincts may be a good idea, implementation would be costly and difficult, plus they would not solve any of the current problems that exist in polling places. Failing old tabulator machines and ballot chain of custody are serious issues that need to be addressed, as evident in the Detroit mayoral elections. MERA is working on a report detailing some of these issues that will be published soon.

As for the Secretary of State's Office handling all of the QVF maintenance, their track record is not exemplary in that regard. The statewide voter purge conducted by that office in 2006 was somewhat ineffective and had an error rate of 2% to 6%, which is detailed in the MERA report released in March 2010 (<http://www.michiganelectionreformalliance.org/2006MIVoterPurge.pdf>). Local Clerks have personnel who are more familiar with individual voters and local address changes. They have been handling the QVF process effectively in concert with the Secretary of State for decades. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Please visit our web site at MichiganElectionReformAlliance.org for more information. Thank you for addressing these issues and listening to our recommendations.

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