

House Committee on Elections and Ethics
519 Anderson House Office Building, Lansing MI
Testimony to HIB 5974
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Submitted by Nancy L. Bedell
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A MERA Representative to Michigan Election Coalition
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Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony to the committee today. I am Nancy Bedell, Secretary of Michigan Election Reform Alliance, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving election administration and voter access in Michigan, and one of several representatives from MERA to the Michigan Election Coalition, which coordinates election activity among non-profits in Michigan. I am the only West Michigan member of MERA and often the only West Michigan representative working with the Michigan Election Coalition. My home is in Grand Rapids Township.

MERA members are very disturbed that the Committee on Elections and Ethics of the Michigan House of Representatives should be proposing legislation which essentially would discourage voting as would be the case with HIB 5974. This legislation does nothing which state and national voting rights organizations propose as important enhancements to voting, making it simpler, easier and thus more inclusive. Voting rates around the country are stagnant or declining. The organization Nonprofit Vote reports that students and low-income citizens continue to represent only 10% of the voters in the recent general election. MERA would expect the Legislature would support some of the Michigan Secretary of States' proposals for improving voting such as no-reason absentee voting or other proposals such as an early voting period (applied currently in 32 states) and election day registration. All of these initiatives would help to solve the problem of lines which form particularly during presidential elections. Lines disenfranchise voters because many voters cannot wait for long periods in line due to job and family commitments. Other suggestions made by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law include assuring that precinct size is uniform, making voter registration portable from federal agencies rather than just from the state's Department of Motor Vehicles.

Michigan Election Reform Alliance (MERA) and our coordinating organization Michigan Election Coalition have been supporting these enhancements for several years. MERA also supports having an election tabulator available in "test" mode at the city or township office for absentee voters to check their ballots for inaccuracies before submitting them. This is one important advantage of voting in person at the present time: if one votes an over or undervote, the tabulator will alert the voter and he/she may spoil that ballot and mark another. If a citizen votes absentee the mistaken race is simply not counted.

We want the Committee to understand and appreciate the work that we are doing studying election administration, accuracy of tabulators, attempting to prevent unnecessary voter purges, doing ongoing voter protection at elections. We are not only “opposed” to legislation, but have concrete ideas for improving our voting system in Michigan. We urge you to partner with us to improve voting in Michigan using tested and tried methods already in place in many other states.

Thank you for your attention.