

Michigan Election Reform Alliance.org - Testimony

Statement to the House Committee on Ethics and Elections

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Regarding S 754 Third Party Voter Registration

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S 754 Third Party Voter Registration

Unfettered third party voter registration is not an ephemeral privilege, but is actually implied by the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment clauses on assembly and petition. Since valid petition signatures must be from registered voters, the right to meet to assist individual citizens in satisfying the legal conditions for petitioning should be regarded as a guaranteed right that shall not be infringed upon. Any infringement would also infringe upon the right to assemble and petition the government. Therefore, all of the proposed Sec. 509v (2) D should be dropped as unconstitutional.

There would be little need for third party voter registration drives if Michigan were to ramp up its voter registration services in compliance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. At the present time, despite some improvement in the provision of mail-in forms at some State agencies, Michigan still fails to provide voter registration before a sworn official at State Offices, Universities, and many other locales. Many other states, notably Connecticut, have made voter registration services a priority and have reached documented success in raising the percentage of eligible adults who are registered to vote. An improved program in Michigan would require cooperation between the Secretary of State and the Governor, who administers State service agencies.

Michigan also fails to incentivize its 1700 local Clerks and 83 County Clerks to go out into the community and conduct registration activities. When was the last time you saw such an official at a public event where voter registration was offered? When was the last time your local nursing home or high school had a visit from a local registration official?

In the breach, Michigan has left voter registration up to amateurs, who have sought to do their best, even when denied "assistantizing" by their County or local Clerk. Restricting and punishing such dedicated citizens is certainly not in the public interest, even if it were constitutional.

The proposal to have the SOS punitively manage third party registration programs simply will not substitute for a thoughtful and comprehensive program in which the officials who are responsible and authorized to register voters, and to assistantize local trained volunteers, do their jobs.