



THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS

M I C H I G A N

EDUCATING AND ADVOCATING FOR RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

Testimony of Sue Smith, President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan
Before the Michigan House Redistricting and Elections Committee
January 24, 2012

Good morning. My name is Sue Smith and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on proposed election reforms.

The League believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. We have a long history of supporting election laws that protect the integrity of our elections.

I want to express the League's support for **HB 5058**, which clarifies when campaign expenditures cannot be used for certain legal expenses, yet allows them to be used when appropriate, such as for a recall campaign. This reform is consistent with the League's position in support of open and accountable government.

The League also supports **HB 5062**, particularly the proposed post-election audit program. Random audits are an effective way to identify possible errors and other problems in an election, which promotes election integrity. The bill also provides for continuing education for county clerks. This requirement works to ensure that election law is applied accurately and consistently throughout the state.

We are opposed to **HB 5061** because of our concerns about the impact of photo ID requirements on voter participation. In the interest of time, I will address the remainder of my testimony to those concerns.

- **The photo ID requirement in HB5061 is not necessary.**

Michigan has strong election laws to protect the integrity of our elections. There are no known cases of voter impersonation in Michigan. The clerks who run our elections have attested to this fact.

Since there is no evidence of voter impersonation in Michigan, the proposed photo ID requirement in HB5061 is not necessary.

The Qualified Voter File is currently used to verify the identity of a person applying for an absentee ballot. People who vote absentee by mail will continue to have their identity verified by signature. However, under HB5061, those who apply for their absentee ballots in person will have to show a photo ID. The bill creates two classes of absentee voters.

- **Photo ID requirements harm legitimate voters by making voting more difficult and costly.**

Photo ID requirements put up barriers to citizens who want to vote but don't have the necessary identification. While it is true that in Michigan, citizens may sign an affidavit in lieu of providing photo ID,

this fact is not publicized by the Secretary of State nor other election officials. Many qualified voters who do not have photo IDs may stay home, not knowing that signing an affidavit is an option.

For many of us, using photo identification is a daily fact of life. However, an estimated 10 percent of voting-age Americans do not have an acceptable photo ID. In Michigan, this translates to more than 700,000 voting age citizens who do not have photo identification.

Nearly one out of every five people aged 65 or older do not have a government-issued photo ID. Other people who often lack photo identification include those with low incomes, minorities, and young adults.

Some people have an extremely difficult time obtaining a photo ID. It can involve taking time off from work to apply, which is not an option for everyone. Lack of transportation and mobility can also be a problem. Several documents, including a birth certificate, are required. These documents require time and expense to obtain. For some people, an official record of birth does not exist.

Consider the difficulty an 81-year old woman faced when applying for an enhanced driver's license, as reported in the Bay City Times. She was born at home and a birth certificate was never issued. She had used a court affidavit of her birth to obtain other legal documents but the State requires an original birth certificate to obtain a drivers license. Through her persistence, the local clerk intervened to help her obtain acceptable documentation but the whole process took five months. Most people will not receive assistance from their clerk but will be left to work through the red tape on their own. Some people simply will not be able to obtain acceptable documentation of their birth.

In summary, HB5061 creates unnecessary barriers to voting and we urge the committee to vote against the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.