

Elections and Ethics Committee Testimony, October 30, 2019 10:30 AM

Good morning Madame Chair, Vice Chair and fellow representatives. I am Representative Ann Bollin. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on HB 5123. HB 5123 would require local units with more than one precinct to establish absent voter counting boards.

In Michigan, there are two different methods of counting absent voter ballots. In the precinct or by an absent voter counting board.

The precinct method utilizes two precinct workers of different party affiliations to process the ballots on behalf of the voter. These workers open the AV envelopes, remove the ballots and then put them through the tabulator during a lull in the precinct. While this is allowable, it does not lead to a favorable impression by voters and is often perceived as 'stuffing the ballot box'. In high turn-out elections there may be no lulls, leaving the processing of these ballots until after the polls close at 8:00 p.m.

Absent voter counting boards, on the other hand, are special teams. They are generally housed in the same building as the local clerk but are sequestered throughout the entire day. The absent voter counting board is responsible for processing the ballots in the absence of the voter on election day. Because they are sequestered and sworn to secrecy, and because they do not have to wait for a lull, they are able to process ballots continuously throughout election day.

An absent voter counting board is established by the local election commission and the workers are trained and certified. The board must have a make-up of people from at least two different political parties.

With the passage of Proposal 3, local clerks have already seen an uptick in the number of absent voter ballots in their elections this past year. 2020 will be the first general election cycle under the new law. Some clerks are already looking for other solutions. I believe that HB's 5031, 5032 and this bill, will serve as tools in the tool box to help manage the anticipated record turnout and the implementation of Proposal 3 and no reason AV. By increasing precinct size and adding additional polling locations, resources can be freed up to address the increase in AV ballots. These bills will also provide a base, or foundation if you will, for moving forward and identifying other changes or solutions that could be beneficial and serve as an integral part of ensuring we are running free and fair elections in our great State.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

