

Thank you Madam Chair & members of the committee. I come before you today to provide testimony in support of my bill, HB 4210 and my H-1 sub coming to your committee next week, which aims to implement electronic absentee voting return for spouses and dependents of active military personnel absent from their place of residence. As a staunch advocate for democratic participation, I firmly believe that this bill is a vital step towards ensuring the voting rights of our brave service members and their families. I'm pleased to note that I'm not alone in this endeavor, this bill has received bi-partison support in co-sponsorship. And after my brief introductory remarks, we will hear from others who support this legislation and from Veterans Affairs to help us best understand some of the barriers service members and their families face while voting and carrying out their civic duties including;

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson

Erin Schor, Legislative Policy Director, Michigan Department of State.

Vice Commander Scott Nichols, Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 Ann Arbor, who will be speaking in support of the Bill as a veteran.

And Terry Sabo, Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, who is neutral and will be sharing some information with us.

I think it's safe to say that everyone in this room recognizes the significant sacrifices made by our military personnel and their families. The commitment and dedication demonstrated by those serving in the armed forces are commendable and often require them to be stationed far from their homes and loved ones. In such circumstances, it is only fair that we take every measure to facilitate their ability to exercise their fundamental right to vote, regardless of their physical location. And late last year, the Michigan state legislature did just that. With broad bi-partisan support electronic returns of absentee ballots were approved for "eligible members" that is to say a member of a uniformed service on active duty or a merchant marine as defined in PA 306 subsection 6 & 13.

Expanding voting for military spouses and families would further demonstrate that we recognize the sacrifices made by our service members and their families. It would also demonstrate that we value their participation in shaping the future of our state and nation. By providing spouses and dependents with the tools necessary to exercise their right to return their absentee ballots electronically, we honor their service and dedication while fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy. Lastly, it demonstrates a shared commitment with our military members to promote and uphold democratic values, around the world.

By expanding the electronic return of absentee ballots for military spouses and dependents, we can eliminate the numerous barriers they currently face when attempting to participate in the democratic process. The challenges associated with traditional absentee voting methods, such as slow mail delivery, lost ballots, and tight timelines, have the potential to disenfranchise those serving overseas and their families. These individuals already face unique hardships and should not encounter additional obstacles when trying to engage in the very foundation of the democratic process they are dedicated to protecting and preserving.

The bill before us today offers a secure and efficient solution to address these concerns. With advancements in secure technology it is now possible to create a reliable system that ensures the integrity and privacy of the voting process. By allowing military spouses and dependents to return their absentee ballots electronically, we provide them with a convenient and reliable means to return their ballots from anywhere in the world, overcoming the challenges posed by distance and time zones.

I urge committee members to support and advance HB4210 and the upcoming H-1 sub to enable the electronic return of absentee ballots for spouses and dependents of active military personnel absent from their place of residence. Doing so will ensure that we protect and uphold the democratic rights of our military families, facilitate their engagement in the electoral process, and strengthen the integrity and inclusivity of our democratic system. Thank you for

your consideration, and I trust that you will support this essential legislation. I'm happy to answer any question you may have before welcoming our Secretary of State, Jocelyn Benson.

