



OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

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MICHIGAN – CREATING THE PATH TO VOTER PARTICIPATION OR LEADING THE WAY TO VOTER SUPPRESSION?

DETROIT -- The right to vote for each citizen of our nation is a most sacred and fundamental reflection of our democracy. Thomas Jefferson, one of the founders of this nation said,

“A share in the sovereignty of the states, which is exercised by the citizens at large, in voting the elections is one of the most important rights of the subject, and in a republic ought to stand foremost in the estimation of the law.”

It appears that there are some law makers in the state of Michigan who have never read this, forgotten about it, or have totally ignored why we have a democracy in the first place.

The recent move in last night’s legislative session with the passing of House Bill 6066, sponsored by Representative Lisa Lyons of Alto, is another attempt to diminish, disrespect, and belittle the very essence of who we are as a nation. The constant move to create an issue of voter fraud where none exists eliminates the right to vote when our constitution insists that every individual is entitled to exercise his or her franchise. According to the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the right to vote is not to be *“denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”* Why then are legislators seeking to abridge, as well as to make subservient certain citizens within our nation?

The issue of voter fraud has been debunked, defused, and the very idea simply dissed by the facts of the matter. It does not exist at the level and to the degree that Republican legislators around our nation would have the public to believe. They are designed to reduce the votes of young people, seniors, rural and urban citizens, and people of color. The Brennan Institute has indicated that *“one is more likely to be struck by lightning than voter fraud.”* President Obama has even indicated that experts found only 31 cases out of one billion votes between 2000 and 2014 were determined to be cases of voter fraud. This same result was reflected during the tenure of former Attorney General Eric Holder.

Here in Michigan, this so-called change to the election laws is a solution in search of a crisis. We have witnessed an increase of voter fraud bills, particularly since the election of 2016, in which one of the presidential candidates articulated that millions voted illegally in the general election.

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There has been no evidence to date by anyone to confirm this as a fact. Members of the Republican led legislature in the Michigan House have presented no evidence of voter fraud, impersonation, or insinuation by individuals who have voted illegally. In fact, just the opposite has occurred.

The issue before us is not too many people voting. The issue is not *enough* people participating and exercising their right to vote. In the state of Michigan, 18,339 persons without ID used the option of the affidavit to vote in the 2016 election. The total was 8,000 voters greater than President-Elect Trump's margin of victory. One third of the affidavits came from the city of Detroit, where Hillary Rodham Clinton won 67% of the vote in Wayne county. The change in these laws can make a major difference in the exercising of the right to vote.

House Bill 6066 includes 10 million dollars to pay for the voter ID law. Whereas 10 million may sound like a lot of money, the law makes it impossible for voters to overturn the law by a referendum. If the state has 10 million dollars to improve the process for voting, then let us take these dollars to spend in Detroit and other places for new voting machines, training, poll workers, and optical scanners which can reduce voting time, increase voter efficiency, and increase accountability.

At the same time, while some Michigan lawmakers are supposedly concerned about the issue of voter fraud, they are in court suing to block a recount of the state's presidential vote which could ensure the accuracy of the final voter count. Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette even criticized those behind the recount effort saying "*no evidence of fraud or mistake in the canvas of votes have been cited.*" This may or may not be true. Yet at the same time no evidence of fraud or mistakes have stopped Republicans like Lyons and others from pushing for new voter ID laws. This is a move along with ending same day registration as exemplified in New Hampshire by Governor-Elect Chris Sununu, along with increasing the residency requirements to vote, in North Carolina where Governor Pat McCrory spread bogus claims of voter fraud before he was forced to concede to newly elected Governor Roy Cooper, and in Texas where Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick has called for reviving the states strict voter ID law. These laws have been struck down repeatedly by the federal courts for their discriminatory impact. In the state of Wisconsin, efforts are being made to put an end to early voting, and the *Taking Your Soles To The Poles* voter mobilization program.

The state of Michigan should be increasing the opportunity to vote. We should not be engaged in building walls to prevent the access to the vote. We have already seen the court strike down the attempt to ban straight ticket voting because of its disproportionate effect on African Americans and their right to vote, leading to longer lines in urban communities. We are therefore calling for an end to this rush just before Christmas, to suppress the right to vote. We are therefore calling on Senator Arlan Meekhof, Senate Majority Leader, and others to vote against this bill and ensure the protection of the right to vote for all of Michigan citizens.

We recall Governor Rick Snyder's action to veto bills that required proof of citizenship and photo ID to get a ballot in the 2012 election. We are calling on Governor Snyder once again to veto these bills designed for the suppression of the vote in the state of Michigan. Further we are urging him to advise his Republican colleagues to cease and desist in these efforts. People in Michigan deserve better. The right to vote and access to the polls must be preserved and protected. This is not a black or white issue. This is the right issue. The right to vote must be maintained.

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