



STATE OF MICHIGAN
JOCELYN BENSON, SECRETARY OF STATE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
LANSING

Written Testimony of Jocelyn Benson, Michigan Secretary of State

Submitted For the Record Before the Michigan State Senate Elections Committee

May 12, 2021

As Michigan's chief election officer, I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the people of Michigan to highlight the ways in which the bills under consideration today interfere with our ability to conduct smooth, accessible, and secure elections.

The 2020 election was the most safe, secure and accessible in our state's history. This truth was affirmed through more than 250 audits conducted throughout our state by bipartisan groups of election administrators. We should be championing the policies that made the election successful to continue embracing every citizen's voice in our democracy.

Unfortunately, the bills before you today do not do that. They do just the opposite. These bills open up our sacred polling places and absentee counting boards to partisan interference, and they give politicians the ability to influence election administration and deny our citizens true democracy.

For example, **Senate Bill 290** bans nonpartisan officials from observing our elections and replaces them with partisan challengers representing candidates and political parties. Then **Senate Bill 279** would dramatically increase the number of partisan challengers permitted to observe absentee counting boards to the point where they would outnumber those actually tabulating ballots – an unnecessary change that does nothing to increase transparency but invites chaos and interference in the counting process. Third, **Senate Bill 291** eliminates key accountability measures and protections for election workers, opening the door for partisan challengers to directly interfere with or undermine the counting of ballots.

In short, there is no data – zero – that any of these bills are needed or would increase the integrity of our elections, but plenty to suggest that if they became law they would empower partisan officials to interfere with our elections, undermine the fair and secure count of every vote, and disenfranchise Michigan citizens.

Finally, this week we again have bills that seem like a step in the right direction but would actually do harm. **Senate Bills 300 and 301**, which suggest support for voters by proposing "early voting," would only allow one day of early voting, and on a Saturday two weeks before Election Day. This defies the data that overwhelmingly shows voters are most likely to take advantage of early voting over a series of days and hours close to Election Day itself – such as the weekend prior. Any access this bill might enable is outdone by the confusion among voters and consternation among local election clerks it would generate. I can't help but wonder if its inclusion today is a cynical attempt to mislead the public from the true nefarious and detrimental impact the overall package of bills would have on our democracy.

I will close by continuing to reiterate and remind the committee that our office, and local election administrators throughout Michigan, have submitted proposals for your consideration that are based on data and facts with a focus on advancing the vote and protecting democracy. Yet those requests continue to be ignored as you choose instead to advance falsehoods, partisan goals and personal agendas over what is best for our clerks and voters. This is a true disappointment, and a disservice to every Michigander.