

EXPANDED EARLY VOTING:

A Commonsense Solution for Voters and Clerks

The Michigan Legislature must provide additional voting options before Election Day to support equitable access to the ballot and alleviate stress on local clerks.

BACKGROUND

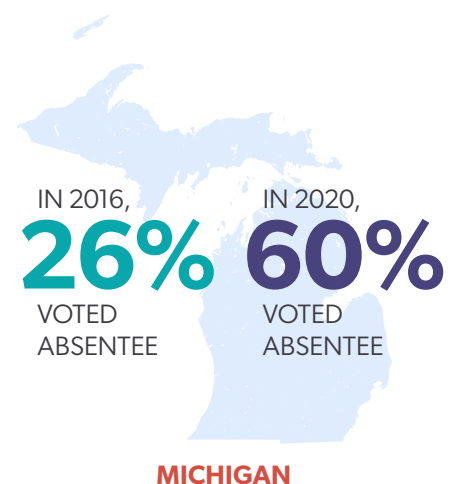
Michigan voters overwhelmingly approved Proposal 3 in 2018 with 67% of the vote, allowing no-excuse absentee voting.

In 2016, only 26% of Michigan voters voted absentee. By the 2020 election, absentee voting had increased to 60%.¹ Casting a ballot before Election Day is now both familiar to voters and the most popular way of voting. Given the high level of absentee voting, it is unlikely that absentee voting levels will decrease substantially in the near future.

While the growth of absentee voting has been a needed boon for voters, it has created costs for local clerks. Clerks across Michigan have reported staffing shortages and increased costs in postage.

The Michigan Legislature and local governments have not adequately increased their budgets to meet the growing staffing and budgetary demands brought on by the high levels of absentee voting.

However, an administratively effective and commonsense solution exists to provide voters with access before Election Day, comply with the Michigan State Constitution, and reduce the burden on clerks and voters: **give voters at least a two-week early voting period to cast a ballot directly into a tabulator.**



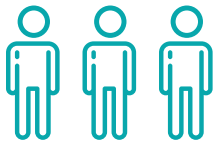
¹ Michigan Department of State Email, November 13, 2020

PROPOSAL

State lawmakers should pass legislation that creates at least a two-week early voting period that includes weekends and evenings, and gives voters the opportunity to see their ballot go directly into a tabulator.



RESEARCH SHOWS THAT AT LEAST TWO WEEKS OF EARLY VOTING:



LEADS TO SHORTER LINES



REDUCES STRESS ON THE
VOTING SYSTEM ON ELECTION DAY



IMPROVES POLL
WORKER PERFORMANCE



IDENTIFIES AND CORRECTS REGISTRATION
ERRORS AND VOTING SYSTEM GLITCHES EARLIER



LEADS TO GREATER ACCESS TO VOTING
AND INCREASED VOTER SATISFACTION

This model has worked well in 19 states and the [District of Columbia](#). North Carolina and Texas offer examples which show that when early voting is available, voters, **regardless of party affiliation**, will use it and prefer it to absentee voting. In Texas, 77% of the electorate voted early in-person in the [2020 general election](#). In North Carolina 65% of voters used [early voting](#). These numbers reflect a higher popularity and comfort, **across party lines**, with early voting.

This version of early voting would help reduce the amount of time required to process absentee ballots. According to the Brennan Center, a well functioning early voting system with sizeable turnout “means administrators have more opportunity to reduce the burdens and stresses caused by having all poll site management challenges (from checking in voters to fixing machines) [converge on a single day](#).”

Most importantly, Michigan voters want the peace of mind voting early affords, and clerks want the benefits it brings to election administration:

"We had about 600 people per day who waited in line to get a ballot just to find out they were technically voting absentee and putting the ballot into an envelope. This led to many, many questions and concerns. Many voters decided to leave and commit to voting on Election Day because they wanted to put their ballot into a tabulator."

Melanie Ryska, Sterling Heights City Clerk



MICHIGAN MUST MEET THE NEEDS OF VOTERS AND CLERKS

Unfortunately, legislation currently in the state capitol doesn't reckon with the reality of early voting or the needs of clerks who run elections. Current proposals limit access for voters and make clerks' jobs harder. SB 300, introduced in the state senate this year, seeks to provide only a single day of early voting. This would limit voters, deny clerks the benefit of using a full two weeks to correct errors, and still lead to high pressure election days.