

October 22, 2021

The Honorable Jocelyn Benson  
Michigan Department of State  
Richard Austin Building  
430 West Allegan Street  
Lansing, MI 48933

By Electronic Mail

**Re: Improved Ballot Tracking**

Dear Secretary Benson:

Your office, along with local clerks around the state, met and exceeded the challenges of the 2020 Presidential cycle. From sending absentee ballot applications to all registered voters to providing personal protective equipment to poll workers, voters were well served by our election system.

However, the challenges to our system have continued and require new action. The United States Postal Service (USPS) has decided to continue [slowing down mail delivery service](#), moving away from the current three-day standard delivery time to five-days, meaning almost four-in-ten pieces of mail will see slower delivery. During the election last year, only 56% of all standard USPS mail in the Metro Detroit area was considered to have been [delivered on time](#). Partisan actors continue to cast doubts about the validity of the results of the last election, and have recently proposed an [initiative](#) that would undermine our absentee ballot process. The “Secure MI Vote” initiative would require voters to disclose more information on their absentee ballot applications, potentially confusing voters and leading to more incorrectly filled out applications. Additionally, many voters in Michigan may still be relatively unfamiliar with absentee voting. Last year 60% of the electorate voted absentee, a jump from 26% in 2016, meaning many voters voted absentee for the first time in 2020.

Our current ballot tracking system does not do enough to help voters face these unique challenges. While some communities have a more robust tracking system, others do not – leaving voters with an inconsistent level of service. The statewide system, the Michigan Voter Information Center, requires a voter to be proactive in seeking out information and provides little information about where a ballot is at any moment.

To ensure that all voters receive the same level of service, your office should implement an improved statewide ballot tracking system. We believe that such a system should be implemented with the following elements:

1. Outgoing and incoming ballot envelopes should contain an intelligent tracking barcode.
2. A voter should receive a notification that their absentee ballot application has been accepted.

3. A voter should receive a notification that their absentee ballot application has been rejected, along with the steps they can take to cure the rejection.
4. A voter should receive a notification when their clerk has delivered their ballot to the USPS.
5. A voter should receive an estimate about when their ballot will be delivered to them.
6. A voter should receive a notification if their ballot is returned as undeliverable by the USPS.
7. A voter should receive a notification when their ballot has been received but is not ready for processing and counting, along with the steps the voter can take to have their ballot counted.
8. A voter should receive a notification when their completed ballot has been received, and is ready for processing and counting.
9. A voter should receive a reminder of the deadline for the voter to return his or her ballot, if their ballot has not been received seven days before the election.
10. Notifications from the updated system should be available in multiple languages.

These ten elements would go far in ensuring that our absentee ballot system remains truly accessible to everyone. The intelligent barcode system, which has been implemented in [Iowa](#), [Virginia](#), and [California](#), would give local clerks and the USPS more tools in mail ballot delivery. The barcode, firstly, would differentiate the ballots from other mail in the postal system, making ballots easier to track and ultimately find in the event they are missing or delayed. The barcode would also give clerks up to date information about the timeliness of postal delivery, giving clerks a better idea of how to adjust to slower delivery times. Since the barcode is integrated into the USPS internal tracking system, clerks would be warned if an address is undeliverable.

Clerks across Michigan, have noted that many of the incoming calls they handle involve answering voters' questions about the status of their absentee ballots. A proactive notification system would help to preempt these calls, and free election staff to perform other critical tasks ahead of Election Day. Most importantly, the notifications would give voters a better chance to correct issues with their applications and ballots before Election Day. Given the potential implementation of the Secure MI Vote initiative, some voters will likely need the notifications to ensure their ballots count. Similar notifications systems have been implemented in [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Georgia](#), [Nevada](#), and [North Carolina](#).

The cost of such a system would be minimal to the state. If your office hired an outside contractor, like BallotTrax, the state would only be charged [2 to 5 cents per voter](#) for the system. In 2020, the cost would have been between \$66,000 to \$165,000. We believe this is a small and necessary cost to ensure all voters in our state continue to have access to and confidence in all voting methods.

We strongly believe that your office can implement the suggested solutions outlined above, under the broad supervisory powers granted to you through MCL 168.21 and 168.31. We would appreciate it if you would inform us about your plans to address these issues. Please contact Aghogho Edevbie (aghogho@allvotingislocal.org). We appreciate your attention to this letter.

Sincerely,

Aghogho Edevbie

Michigan State Director

All Voting is Local

Clare Allenson

Democracy for All Director

Michigan League of Conservation Voters Education Fund

Rebeka Islam

Executive Director

Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote - Michigan