

# SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

# Press Release

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## **Senators Demand Chamber Take Up Absentee Voting Reform Tomorrow**

*Following House approval last week, Thursday's session is last chance to enact reform for November election, avoid logistical nightmare*

LANSING - Today Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) and Sen. Gilda Z. Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) urged colleagues in the Senate to take up House Bill 4048, legislation that passed the House last week that would allow everyone of voting age and eligibility to vote by absentee ballot if they choose. Sen. Brater is the sponsor of Senate Bill 12, introduced in January of 2007, which would accomplish the same goals as the House bill. Sen. Jacobs serves as Minority Vice Chair of the Senate Campaign and Elections Oversight Committee, where the Senate version of the bill currently awaits the attention of Chair Sen. Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau).

"This is an election year unlike any other, with a record turnout expected at the polls this fall, and HB 4048 will make the election process more efficient, keep costs and lines down, and eliminate barriers to voting," said Sen. Brater. "Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land and county, city and municipal clerks around Michigan support this legislation, and with the House's action last week, it appears my colleagues across the aisle in the Senate are the only ones still preventing its implementation."

Currently there are limitations on absentee voting in Michigan. Only voters who are over 60 years old, incarcerated awaiting arraignment or trial, have religious objections, plan to be out of their precinct on Election Day, or need assistance at the polls are eligible to vote absentee. There are no provisions for people who are working long days or odd shifts, have young children at home, have transportation issues, become ill or hospitalized, or have trouble getting to the polls for reasons other than those listed on the absentee ballot application. HB 4048 and the Senate version of the bill would remove limitations, making absentee voting an option for all eligible voters.

"The House has voted in favor of full participatory democracy in this election year and approved a bill to allow for no reason absentee voting," said Sen. Jacobs. "However, the Senate Republican Chair of the Campaign and Elections Oversight Committee has yet to schedule a hearing on the Senate version of this bill, which was introduced in January 2007. We have the ability to make this happen in time for the election if we can move the bills before the week is over. We urge the committee chairwoman to move quickly while there's still time."

Twenty-eight states currently have no reason absentee voting legislation, with three additional states permitting in person voting prior to Election Day. In Michigan, it has the support of Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land, Oakland County Clerk Ruth Johnson, Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh and other city and municipal clerks around Michigan, the ACLU, the NAACP, AARP, and current and past state legislators from both chambers and both sides of the aisle. Earlier this summer, Senators Brater and Jacobs kicked off their No Excuses Voting initiative to promote no reason absentee voting in Michigan and aggressively call for action on the legislation by their Senate colleagues, a call that has only grown louder with the House's efforts last week.

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