

Press Release

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Senate Republicans Kill Last Chance to Allow Easier Absentee Voting for This Year's Election

Senators Brater and Jacobs force vote on No Reason Absentee Voting to decrease Election Day lines, Senate Republicans stand in the way

LANSING -In the Senate today, Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) and Sen. Gilda Z. Jacobs' (D-Huntington Woods) efforts to achieve a full vote on no reason absentee voting legislation were postponed until after the election by Senate Republicans Majority. The Senate had the power to take up House Bill 4048, after its passage in the House last week, and Senate Bill 12, which Sen. Brater introduced in January of 2007. Both bills would allow every eligible voter to vote by absentee ballot if they choose, and could have been instituted in time for this year's election if action was taken today.

"Only a month away from a historic election that will have a record turnout, we missed an opportunity to strengthen the democratic process and make sure that no Michigan voter loses the right to vote because of obstacles to getting to the polls on Election Day," said Sen. Brater. "This should not be a Republican or a Democratic issue, but a democracy issue, and this year more than ever we should be opening the election process to everyone who wants to cast a vote."

HB 4048 and the Senate version of the bill would remove limitations, making absentee voting an option for all eligible voters. SB 12 has languished in the Senate Campaign and Elections Oversight Committee under Chair Sen. Michelle McManus (R-Leelanau) since its introduction in January 2007. Earlier this summer, Senators Brater and Jacobs kicked off their No Excuses Voting initiative to promote no reason absentee voting in Michigan and call for action on the legislation by their Senate colleagues. With the House's passage of HB 4048 last week, Senate Republican Leaders Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) and Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) had the power to move the legislation today, but again failed to act on this important reform.

"The officials most directly involved with the democratic process-the Secretary of State and county and city clerks across Michigan-all agree that no reason absentee voting is a beneficial and necessary advancement in voting access," said Sen. Jacobs, Minority Vice Chair of the Senate Campaign and Elections Oversight Committee. "We are still in the process of registering voters, and at landmark numbers at that, and we certainly could implement no reason absentee by Election Day. It would actually alleviate overcrowding and confusion at the polls, and if it's good enough for Governor Palin's

home state of Alaska and Sen. McCain's native soil of Arizona, it should be good enough for the people of 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 currently eligible to vote absentee in Michigan. 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. 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.

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