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Jacobs, Brater: Recent Election Highlights Need to Make Voting Easier

Lansing -- Senator Gilda Z. Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) and Senator Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) addressed voter concerns from last Tuesday's election and discussed the need to move on voter reform legislation in time for the next general election in 2010 at a press conference today.

"Every eligible voter should be able to easily exercise their right to vote," said Senator Jacobs, Democratic Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Campaign and Election Oversight. "Over the past few weeks we saw how Michigan lags behind many other states that simplify voting through No Reason Absentee Voting and other methods. It's time for Michigan to adopt voter reforms and make voting easier for the next election cycle."

Michigan currently limits absentee voting to voters who are over 60 years old, incarcerated, have religious reasons for not voting on Election Day, plan to be out of their precinct on Election Day, or need assistance at the polls. 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.

"No Reason Absentee Voting has the support of clerks across Michigan as well as the support of Michigan Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land," said Senator Brater, the sponsor of Senate Bill 12, the No Reason Absentee Voting bill in the Senate. "By adopting this legislation as well as other important reforms, we can make the voting process more efficient, keep costs down, and eliminate barriers that may prevent many Michiganders from exercising their right to vote, and make it particularly difficult for others to get to the polls."

Michigan also requires first time voters to vote in person, which means that even if they are going to be out of town on Election Day--if they are traveling or are a student attending school in another city-- they cannot vote by absentee ballot. Dozens of states currently allow no reason absentee voting as well as early voting.

In October Senator Jacobs and Senator Brater tried to force a vote on the House version of No Reason Absentee Voting, House Bill 4048, after the House had passed the bill but were blocked by Senate Republicans. They then attempted to discharge Senate Bill 12, but that too was denied by Senate Republicans. Both bills are still awaiting action by the Senate Campaign and Election Oversight Committee.

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