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Benson calls for nonpartisan legislation needed for 2022 elections

Today, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson said four nonpartisan legislative changes are needed ahead of this year's statewide elections.

"Michigan voters deserve election results on election night and for their elections to be sufficiently funded. Election workers and officials need the state's protection to continue doing their jobs with integrity, and our military service members and their spouses defending our democracy overseas must have certainty that their ballot will be counted here at home," said Benson. "The strength and security of Michigan's elections are second to none, but these four legislative changes are critically needed by election clerks on both sides of the aisle and Republican, Democratic and Independent voters statewide."

"Every Michigander deserves to have their voice heard as they exercise their constitutional right to vote in a safe and secure election," said Governor Gretchen Whitmer. "Our democracy works when every eligible voter—no matter who they support—has safe, convenient, and secure access to the ballot. Protecting the right to vote is not a political or partisan issue; it is foundational to who we are as Americans. We can work together to protect people's voices by passing robust voting rights protections. Let's get this done for the sake of our democracy."

Benson called for the state Legislature to pass bills that do the following:

Get Michigan voters election results on election night by allowing preprocessing of absentee ballots. Florida, Kentucky, Ohio, and many other states process absentee ballots before Election Day and then have unofficial election results on election night. But because Michigan law does not allow absentee ballot processing to begin until Election Day, voters have had to wait up to 24 hours after polls close to get results. The delay is not well-understood by many voters and election deniers exploit this and spread misinformation that undermines well-placed faith in our elections and threatens American democracy. In February 2022, both the associations of the [municipal and county clerks called on the Legislature](#) to allow preprocessing.

Strengthen the security of elections with consistent and sufficient funding. Relying on local governments and federal agencies has resulted in unpredictable and unstable funding for election access, equipment, technology and security. The state Legislature should dedicate \$100 million annually directly to Michigan townships, cities, and counties so our elections are always safe, accessible and secure.

Increase penalties for anyone who threatens, harasses or doxxes election workers. Election officials, workers, and volunteers are increasingly the targets of threats and harassment in Michigan and across the country. They play a critical role in our democracy and need to be protected.

Protect the voting rights of military service members and their spouses overseas by permitting them to return their ballots electronically. Michigan is behind many other states by requiring overseas military and their spouses to rely on unpredictable international mail to return their ballots. As a result, about 25% of military ballots were returned too late to be counted or not at all in the 2020 presidential election, potentially disenfranchising more than 1,600 members of our armed services.

"The brave military personnel and their families who are abroad protecting our country and preserving our democracy deserve the same equitable access to the ballot box as every other Michigander," state Sen. Adam Hollier (D-Detroit) said. "The Michigan Legislature must work together to reform our election laws, beginning with the freedom to vote safely, securely, and efficiently for military personnel and their spouses stationed overseas. As a Captain in the Army and a legislator, I am proud to support Secretary Benson in this mission to get these reforms made as soon as possible."

"Every day, our military personnel put their lives on the line to protect our freedom, including our right to vote. We have a responsibility to make sure they can exercise this right and engage in the democracy they are protecting," said state Rep. Padma Kuppa (D-Troy), sponsor of House Bill 5514, which allows military personnel to submit ballots electronically. "I stand with Secretary Benson in ensuring the votes of the courageous people serving our nation are heard here at home."

"During the 2020 election, we all remember anxiously waiting for the election results to trickle in. The truth is there is no need for another delay like that," said state Rep. Matt Koleszar (D-Plymouth), sponsor of House Bill 5518, which would allow for seven days of pre-processing of absentee ballots for clerks. "Many states already allow voting administrators to pre-process ballots effectively and securely before election day. Votes would still be counted only on election day, but this process alleviates the stress on administrators and the suspense of voters by getting the election results sooner."

Michigan's primary elections will be held on Tuesday, August 2, 2022. The general election is Tuesday, November 8, 2022.

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