

BETTER RECRUITMENT TOOLS:

Michigan Needs More Poll Workers to Ensure Elections Run Smoothly

The Michigan Legislature must support poll worker recruitment by providing additional tools for local clerks.

BACKGROUND

Poll workers are in increasingly short supply. During the 2020 election, many clerks had trouble staffing the legal minimum of [three poll workers per precinct](#). A 2018 report from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission found that just 10% of poll workers in Michigan were between the ages of 18 and 40.¹ While a flood of attention and the [Democracy MVP program](#) helped avert disaster in 2020, holding an election during a coronavirus pandemic highlighted the long term need for a more robust base of poll workers.

Clerks are being asked to do more during an election, especially with the growth of absentee voting. This in turn creates more tasks for poll workers, but gives clerks less time to recruit them.

Shortages of staff at polling places can reduce access for voters with disabilities who rely on the assistance of poll workers to vote.

Numerous clerks have had problems recruiting a sufficient number of poll workers to ensure there is partisan parity at each polling location, heightening political suspicion and fueling disinformation about the fairness of our elections.



¹ Data are derived from the 2018 EAVS Survey and the 2017 5-yr American Community Survey.

PROPOSAL

Michigan lawmakers should bolster and compliment existing poll worker recruitment efforts before the 2022 midterm elections.



WE RECOMMEND THAT THE MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE MANDATES:



The secretary of state and clerks must maintain a database of eligible poll workers, leading to easy recurring recruitment and the ability to identify gaps in poll worker recruitment before elections;



An option for absentee voters to indicate their interest in becoming a poll worker by including a check box on the absentee voter application, paving the way for the data to be stored in the state's Qualified Voter File. This would lead to easier recruitment by clerks and the secretary of state, with only a minor addition to an absentee ballot application;



Making permanent the Democracy MVP poll worker recruitment program to ensure it lasts beyond the tenure of the current secretary of state, and that clerks do not have to spend inordinate amounts of time recruiting poll workers;



Major political parties recruit 10% of needed poll workers during each federal election cycle.

These poll workers can be used to ensure the required partisan balance, and harnessing political parties lets them help fix a problem rather than sit on the sidelines. Additionally, each party would also have poll workers they could easily communicate with to understand what exactly happened in each election cycle, decreasing partisan suspicions. The Michigan certification process by law is a bipartisan process, and obtaining assistance from each party ensures that each party is invested in a fair outcome.

These fixes harness existing statewide processes and parties to help alleviate the burden on local clerks.



LEGISLATION NEEDS TO FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS TO FIND MORE POLL WORKERS

Unfortunately, proposed solutions to Michigan's shortage of poll workers are easy to find, except in the state capitol. There, bad bills like SB 294, which mandates that municipalities that don't have partisan parity, report back to legislators, don't attempt to actually solve the problem: **the lack of poll workers.**

Efforts such as these continue to leave local clerks in a lurch and make our elections difficult to administer, while politicians get to score political points by playing the blame game. The Michigan Legislature needs to get serious about working on real solutions to engage eager Michigan voters as civically minded poll workers.

Solutions to Michigan's shortage of poll workers are easy to find.