

BALLOT DROP BOX STANDARDS: Solutions to Protect a Popular Tool for Voters

The Michigan Legislature must protect and expand ballot drop box accessibility, and set uniform standards for their use.

BACKGROUND

In locations throughout the U.S. where voters have access to vote-by-mail, as many as 80% of voters use a drop box to [return their ballot](#). Prior to last year's election, 74% of registered voters polled across the country wanted access to a [drop box](#). With this clear voter demand for ballot drop boxes, many Michigan communities justifiably responded by installing them during the 2020 election cycle.

However, not every community providing drop boxes did so equally or evenly throughout Michigan. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission recommends one drop box for every [15,000 to 20,000 voters](#). Some communities met this standard, others did not:

1 Livonia had just one drop box for over [81,000 registered voters](#).

4 Novi, with over [45,000 registered voters](#), installed an adequate four drop boxes to meet the needs of their voters. However, all of their drop boxes were installed at [one location](#).

Beyond the numbers of drop boxes and their distribution, some voters were confused. The hours of availability for drop boxes were not uniform across the state, nor was the look or branding of drop boxes.

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PROPOSAL

Michigan lawmakers need to set drop box standards before the next election.



DROP BOX STANDARDS SHOULD INCLUDE:



A minimum of one drop box per every 15,000–20,000 voters in a jurisdiction



Equal and convenient distribution so drop boxes are close to where voters live



Uniform branding and security standards for easily recognizable drop boxes



Best practices for collecting and handling ballots placed in drop boxes

These recommendations would help avoid confusion and ensure that every voter has an equal opportunity to use drop boxes.

The standardization of ballot drop boxes capitalizes on their popularity while making sure that all communities benefit.



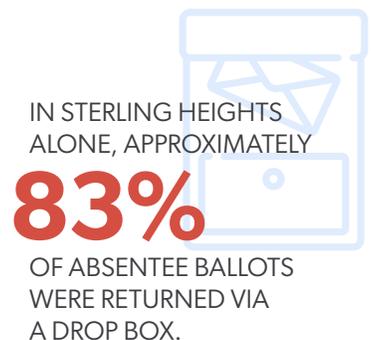
LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD AND CAPITALIZE ON THE ADVANTAGES OF DROP BOXES

The standardization of ballot drop boxes capitalizes on their popularity while making sure that **all communities benefit**. Voters sometimes make mistakes with their signature, but ballots submitted via a drop box allow for clerks to receive ballots faster and contact voters while there is still an opportunity to cure mistakes. Every community in Michigan must give voters and clerks this advantage uniformly.

In the short time of their use in Michigan, drop boxes have proven to be a popular option. **In Sterling Heights alone, approximately 83% of absentee ballots were returned via a drop box.**¹ It would be a waste of valuable resources to abandon drop boxes moving forward, when the state could simply set standards to adopt them in a way that's equal for every community.

Lastly, drop boxes are a convenient option to return ballots without relying on the postal system. In the fourth quarter of 2020, only 56% of all standard USPS mail in the Metro Detroit area was considered to have been delivered on time. With further plans to slow mail rates in the future, drop boxes would be a wise investment to alleviate dependency on the USPS.

Unfortunately, many legislative proposals in the statehouse miss the big picture of how drop boxes should work in Michigan. SB 286 would ban the use of drop boxes in the final hours of an election, unnecessarily punishing voters. SB 273 would require the joint approval of the secretary of state and canvassing board to install drop boxes, taking power away from local officials and potentially limiting who has access to drop boxes. Giving local officials guidelines, so they can install drop boxes fairly, is the better option.



¹ Sterling Heights City Clerk's Office Email, April 14, 2021