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**CONTACT:**  
**Lia Simcina**, The Rossman Group  
Office: (517) 487-9320  
Cell: (313) 590-3267

# **Michigan poll: Make voting more convenient**

## **7 of 10 voters support early, no-excuse absentee voting**

**LANSING, Mich.** – A whopping 70 percent of Michigan voters believe the Legislature should pass bills to make it easier for citizens to cast ballots, putting Michigan in line with actions in a majority of states to make voting more convenient.

The statewide poll, sponsored by the League of Women Voters and the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks, showed deep support for a bill that would allow voters to cast absentee ballots for any reason and a companion piece of legislation that would permit people to vote at polling places days in advance of the actual election.

Amazingly, support for a package including both reforms did not drop below 55 percent in any of the poll's 29 demographic segments – whether it be gender, partisan affiliation, age, geography, ethnicity, frequency of absentee voting, occupation or the presence of children in the household.

“Whether black or white, urban or rural, blue collar or white collar, old or young – voters support these common sense reforms which are tailored to accommodate people living in an increasingly busy world,” said Dennis Denno, whose firm Denno-Noor Research conducted the survey. “Based on these results, making voting easier and more convenient seems like a no-brainer.”

Michigan has failed to keep up with 32 states – including neighboring states Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin – that have implemented “early voting” statutes so a voter can go to a polling place as early as two weeks before an election to cast a ballot. Twenty-nine states provide no-excuse absentee voting, whereas Michigan essentially restricts absentee voting to those 60 and older, the physically handicapped, those who expect to be out of town on Election Day, and those who can't go to a polling place because of a religious belief.

The need to do everything possible to make voting hassle free takes on added significance in Michigan this year given that the top four constitutional offices are open due to term limits (governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state and attorney general) as well as 63 open seats in the Legislature. Term limits will cause a huge shakeup of the Senate where 29 of the 38 seats will be up for grabs.

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In the House, 34 of the 110 members are also prohibited by law from running while another 14 are giving up their seats to seek higher office. Additionally, three of the state's 15 members of the U.S. House are not seeking re-election, an unusually high number.

"There is no more fundamental and cherished right in our country than exercising the right to vote, especially during elections as significant as those in 2010," said Jessica Reiser, president of the League of Women Voters of Michigan, a 90-year-old nonpartisan organization that encourages citizen participation in government. "As a pro-voter organization, The League of Women Voters strongly supports reforms that make voting more accessible and convenient.

Legislation to grant voters the right to receive no-excuse absentee ballots easily cleared the Michigan House on a bipartisan, 79-30 tally. But the bill has languished since May 6 of last year in the Senate Committee on Government Operations and Reform.

If the reforms were to wind up on the ballot, a lopsided 75 percent of those surveyed said they would be more likely to vote "yes" based just on the convenience it would offer voters.

"We allow citizens to pay their taxes through the mail. Why shouldn't voters be extended the same courtesy? When more people get involved in the process it makes for a healthier democracy," said Reiser.

Delhi Township Clerk Evan Hope said residents often come to clerk's offices assuming Michigan has early and no-excuse absentee voting because they've heard about it on the national level.

"Unfortunately, the majority of voters requesting an absentee ballot do not meet the requirements – and because they don't want to lie on the application, they risk not making it to the polls on Election Day," said Hope, first vice president of the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks.

"I hear from people all too often that there were issues they had no idea were on the ballot," Hope added. "If voters were able to come in and vote on their own time or vote absentee, they would be able to review the ballot in detail and make a more informed decision."

Other states have shown the early voting and no-excuse absentee balloting can have the greatest success in boosting voter participation in primary and local elections that traditionally draw less voter interest. Michigan, for instance, has had a pretty pathetic record for turnouts in the last five primary elections – topping 20-percent participation just once (23.3 percent in 2002).

In local school elections, voter turnout is even weaker, and the majority of voters who do participate vote absentee. **For instance....**

**(insert local voter turnout numbers – waiting on Evan)**

Hope also said the enactment of voting reforms could lessen the problems associated with long lines at polling places on Election Day, noting that several-hour waits occur all too frequently.

“The Legislature may not get it, but it’s abundantly clear that Michigan voters do: given the busy lifestyles of today’s families, a 13-hour window to vote on Election Day doesn’t work for everyone,” said Susan Smith, vice president for Program at the League of Women Voters of Michigan. “Michigan is missing out on the national movement to make it easier to exercise the sacred right to vote.”

### **Methodology**

The telephone survey of voter attitudes was conducted by Denno-Noor Research for the League of Women Voters and the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks March 3 – 5, 2010. The sample size was 600, which has a corresponding margin of error of +/-4%.

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