

PROGRESS MICHIGAN PRESENTS A SPECIAL REPORT:



Secure MI Vote: Creating Insecurity for Community Polling Places

*Republican Initiative Could Eliminate
20 Percent of Michigan Polling places*

Introduction

Recently, Michigan Republicans launched a ballot initiative to change Michigan's voting laws. The Secure MI Vote petition is similar to multiple bills introduced by Michigan Republican lawmakers in 2021. Voting rights advocates and local election officials from both parties **have criticized** these proposals saying they will make it harder for Michiganders to vote and make the job of administering elections more difficult for local clerks.

While all the provisions of the Secure MI Vote petition would negatively affect Michigan's elections, this report focuses on a specific consequence of prohibiting clerks from accepting private money or in-kind contributions for election-related activities.

While public buildings such as public schools and township halls are used as polling places, Michigan's local clerks also make use of many nonprofit spaces, including places of worship. These nonprofit spaces are often donated and Secure MI Vote organizers **have conceded** this ballot provision would ban Michigan's clerks from accepting donated spaces as polling places.

"I hope people are able to see the danger and the impact of this proposal and refuse to sign it. If this were to pass, I don't know what I would do. I don't know what other clerks would do," said Mary Clark, president of the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks and the Delta Township clerk. "This is the type of policy that causes me to lay awake at night because it will cause so much confusion amongst voters and put clerks in impossible situations. This would absolutely negatively impact legally registered voters in my jurisdiction and every jurisdiction in this state."

This report details both the number of polling locations and communities that could be affected by this change as well as the challenges those changes would present to both voters and local clerks. The report was compiled by Progress Michigan utilizing 2020 polling place location data from the Secretary of State and interviews with multiple clerks across Michigan.

Consequences of the petition

The specific provision of the Secure MI Vote ballot initiative highlighted in this report would:

- 1. Cause confusion and disruption, leading to voter disenfranchisement**
- 2. Create challenges for clerks who would have to find new polling place locations or reduce the number of polling place locations available**
- 3. Increase costs for election administration**

Churches and similar places of worship account for the majority of nonprofit polling places and comprised approximately 20 percent of all polling places for the 2020 election. Out of Michigan’s 3,355 polling places, approximately 664 were churches, places of worship, or similar religious spaces.

“In my experience,” said Clark, “paying for the use of polling place locations is fairly uncommon.” If these spaces cannot be donated, Michigan’s local election clerks—who already face funding shortages—would be put into an incredibly difficult situation where they have limited options for polling places and limited resources to pay for them. The numbers in this report are likely only the tip of the iceberg, as religious spaces are not the only nonprofit spaces donated as polling places.

According to conversations with clerks, the Secure MI Vote ballot initiative would do away with polling places that have been used in communities for decades and finding alternative locations could be incredibly difficult—if not impossible—and expensive to acquire.

Finding a location to act as a polling place is not like renting out space at a banquet hall for a wedding or family reunion. Polling places must meet a number of legal requirements to be viable, such as being accessible for voters with disabilities. In addition, there are a number of other factors that go into choosing a suitable location for a polling place including the availability and accessibility of public transportation, adequate parking for voters, secure storage for voting equipment, and the availability of 24-hour access for a number of days before and after an election.

There is no provision in the ballot initiative that would require Michigan’s lawmakers to provide additional funding to local election clerks so that they could pay for polling places that used to be donated. Less funding and fewer polling places would likely mean longer distances for voters to travel to their polling place and longer lines for voters.

The end result of this ballot initiative is voters—who are already forced to squeeze voting into busy days with demanding work schedules and childcare responsibilities—would be confused and disenfranchised. This systematic defunding of local elections would make Michigan’s elections, which saw historic turnout in 2020, less accessible.

Note: This report was compiled using readily available information on polling places, however their legal status as religious entities has not been individually confirmed. Progress Michigan also has not confirmed with local election officials that every church or place of worship used for a polling place in 2020 was donated, although it is a confirmed common practice.

By the Numbers

A large graphic of the number 20% where the '2' and '0' are on white rectangular backgrounds and the '%' is on a red octagonal background.

of Michigan polling places in 2020 were churches or similar religious organizations and places of worship (not including private religious schools).

A large graphic of the number 5 on a brown, textured background that looks like a piece of paper or cardboard.

counties used churches as more than **40 percent** of their polling places.

A large graphic of the number 15 on a brown, textured background that looks like a piece of paper or cardboard.

counties used churches as more than **20 percent** of their polling places.

Half of Michigan's 83 counties could lose polling places; 41 counties had at least one church or place of worship as a polling place in 2020. Genesee, Kalamazoo, Kent, and Ottawa Counties—home to more than 1.5 million Michiganders—could lose approximately half of their polling places.

A large graphic of the number 28 where the '2' is on a red background and the '8' is on a white background.

cities or townships used churches as **100 percent** of their polling place(s).

A large graphic of the number 111 on a white background.

cities or townships used churches as at least **50 percent** of their polling place(s).

Of the 1,309 cities and townships that were home to polling places in 2020, 214 or 16 percent, could lose some or even all of their polling places. Some rural townships such as Hazelton Township in Shiawassee County and Mussey Township in St. Clair County only had one polling place in 2020, and those polling places were churches. Some cities such as Battle Creek and Troy had more polling places but also relied heavily on religious spaces. In 2020, nine of Battle Creek's 11 polling places and 16 of Troy's 18 polling places were in places of worship.

[See full results here.](#)

Top 20 Counties

County	Religious Spaces Used as Polling Places	Total Polling Places	Percent of Polling Places that are Religious Spaces
Ottawa County	42	69	60.87%
Kent County	103	207	49.76%
Kalamazoo County	43	87	49.43%
Genesee County	46	100	46.00%
Calhoun County	16	39	41.03%
Monroe County	16	44	36.36%
Eaton County	12	39	30.77%
Oakland County	97	367	26.43%
Ingham County	22	87	25.29%
Livingston County	12	50	24.00%
Jackson County	9	38	23.68%
Wayne County	109	471	23.14%
Alpena County	3	13	23.08%
Saginaw County	14	64	21.88%
Ionia County	5	23	21.74%
Muskegon County	11	63	17.46%
St Clair County	8	49	16.33%
Marquette County	5	31	16.13%
Berrien County	9	56	16.07%
Washtenaw County	16	101	15.84%

Top 50 Cities and Townships

City or Township	Religious Spaces Used as Polling Places	Total Polling Places	Percent of Polling Places that are Religious Spaces
Algonac City	1	1	100.00%
Allendale Township	1	1	100.00%
Ann Arbor Township	1	1	100.00%
Belleville City	1	1	100.00%
Camden Township	1	1	100.00%
Chocolay Township	2	2	100.00%
Davison City	1	1	100.00%
Fenton City	1	1	100.00%
Flint Township	4	4	100.00%
Hastings City	1	1	100.00%
Hazelton Township	1	1	100.00%
Lapeer City	2	2	100.00%
Linden City	1	1	100.00%
Marshall City	1	1	100.00%
Mount Morris City	1	1	100.00%
Mussey Township	1	1	100.00%
Noble Township	1	1	100.00%
Otisco Township	1	1	100.00%
Parchment City	1	1	100.00%
Pennfield Township	3	3	100.00%
Rives Township	1	1	100.00%
Robinson Township	1	1	100.00%
Scipio Township	1	1	100.00%
Sparta Township	1	1	100.00%
Swartz Creek City	1	1	100.00%
Tecumseh Township	1	1	100.00%

Top 50 Cities and Townships continued

Tecumseh Township	1	1	100.00%
Three Rivers City	1	1	100.00%
Whiteford Township	1	1	100.00%
Georgetown Township	11	12	91.67%
Genesee Township	8	9	88.89%
Troy City	16	18	88.89%
Comstock Township	5	6	83.33%
Grandville City	5	6	83.33%
Battle Creek City	9	11	81.82%
Cannon Township	4	5	80.00%
Davison Township	4	5	80.00%
Spring Lake Township	4	5	80.00%
Kentwood City	10	13	76.92%
Atlas Township	3	4	75.00%
Bedford Township	9	12	75.00%
Bridgeport Township	3	4	75.00%
Fruitport Township	3	4	75.00%
Grand Haven City	3	4	75.00%
Grand Haven Township	3	4	75.00%
Independence Township	9	12	75.00%
Holland Township	8	11	72.73%
Allen Park City	5	7	71.43%
Delta Charter Township	10	14	71.43%
Algoma Township	2	3	66.67%
Alma City	2	3	66.67%

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