

Michigan Election Reform Alliance.Org
Newsletter
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Mera Council has been hard at work in the last few months, with its primary focus on legislation and the rights of registered voters not to be improperly unregistered.

Legislation:

MERA testimony to committees of the Michigan legislature is published here:
<http://www.michiganelectionreformalliance.org/legis.html>

Most recently we have testified in favor of a bill that would allow any Michigan clerk to register or confirm voter identity in person for any MI jurisdiction ([testimony here](#)), and against an early voting bill that did not adequately address security and cost ([testimony here](#)).

Vote Count Audits:

The bulk of the legislative committee's time and energy has gone into developing specific legislation for post-election audits of the vote count. Based on the [MERA Legislative Plan](#), work has proceeded from a [New Jersey bill](#) that passed and was signed into law this January. The New Jersey bill is regarded by several national audit groups as the gold standard for state-level audit legislation. It requires hand counts of paper records and sets the standard for post-election audits in terms of probability. The effect is to require a high level of confirmation that reported election results reflect the intent of the voters, without the arbitrariness and inefficiency of requiring audits of a fixed percentage of precincts, irrespective of the margin of victory or other controlling factors.

MERA will have a draft bill adapted for Michigan available to vet publicly in the next few weeks. It will be posted on the web site once it is available.

National Audit Groups:

MERA legislative committee members, Jan Bendor and Phil Shepard, have participated over the winter in numerous conference calls with two national groups: a State Audit Working Group formed after last Fall's national Audit Summit conference in Minnesota (attended by Jan Bendor), and a Verified Voting Audit Group, composed mainly of professional statisticians.

The first group has been working on a set of audit principles to guide state legislation. As of this writing the draft principles are not publically available.

The statisticians group has been developing and refining statistical methods and models for effective, but cost efficient audits based on such basic parameters as the number and size of audit units, and the margin of victory. By the time most states address audit legislation, including Michigan, the statistical state of the art will be far beyond the level of the first Holt bill (national) that required a fixed percentage of precincts to be audited.

The fixed percentage approach does not consistently lead to a high probability in confirming election results nor does it keep costs under control. Both defects contributed to the failure of the first Holt bill. Much of the background to this work and the new approaches can be found here: <http://www.electionaudits.org/>

Postcard Purge:

An ad hoc MERA committee, the Cancellation Countdown Committee, has been investigating a state-level, voter registration list purge operation that began in July of 2006. One of the central questions is whether the use of postcards, returned as undeliverable (for any reason), are being used in Michigan to discriminate against minorities, students, or other groups in the process of purging voter registration lists. While the [NVRA Section 8](#) authorizes and regulates the practice of using mailings to purge voter registration lists, there have been many allegations that it has been used for "caging" in some other states and some law suits have resulted. So it is reasonable to ask whether what has been ongoing in Michigan since July 2006 is also an attempt at "caging."

The Cancellation Countdown Committee consists of Bill Ritterberg, Nancy Bedell, and Karen Wellman. (See [MERA About page](#) for contact information, or email ccc@michiganelectionreformalliance.org.) They have been able to get cooperation in their investigation from several local clerks and one county clerk, and numerous others privy to pieces of the picture. They are in touch with a number of state-wide groups, including the ACLU, ACORN, and the NAACP, and they report regularly to MERA Council.

The Countdown Committee has reach some conclusions. One is that the Michigan Secretary of State's postcard purge is woefully lacking in public transparency. Another is that the effort usurps the authority of local clerks over cancellation of voter registration. While those are significant conclusions, the Committee has not reached closure on the question of discrimination or "caging." Evidence so far points to an incomplete and muddled process, but not to an intent to discriminate.

At an appropriate time, the Committee will report on its investigation publically, and the report will be published on the MERA web site.

MERA Council met last on April 27, using a phone conference call. The next Council meeting is planned for June 1, 1-4 p.m. at Urban Options in East Lansing. The June 1 meeting will be our annual meeting and will include reforming the Council for the next year.

The MERA Newsletter is a service of the Michigan Eleciton Reform Alliance.Org. Please send comments and suggestions to shepard@acd.net.