Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum Calls on Governor Whitmer to Increase Flexibility for Overseas Voters

MASON – Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum (D-Onondaga) called today for Governor Whitmer to address the challenges that COVID-19 has added to the process of voting absentee from overseas via executive order.

“The current methods of voting as a member of the military or a civilian living abroad is challenging and it is nearly impossible to return ballots to local clerks by the Election Day deadline,” Byrum stated. “Some parts of the world simply do not have mail service and others have their borders closed to United States citizens due to the outbreak of COVID-19. All Americans have a right to vote no matter where they are on Election Day and in these extraordinary circumstances, I believe the Governor must take bold action to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to vote.”

Byrum indicated that the Governor could accomplish this by allowing, in very limited circumstances, for proxy voting. Proxy voting would allow a person’s designee to vote a ballot for them. In these cases, they would be required to show that they do not have access to mail, cannot be present on Election Day, and give written authorization to their proxy voter to cast a ballot on their behalf. All records of the proxy voting would be retained with the ballots.

“Given the current postal service interruptions, it is entirely unreasonable to expect that a registered Michigan voter living in Antarctica would be able to get their voted ballot to their local clerk by the close of polls on Election Day, in order for their ballot to be counted,” said Byrum. “There is simply not enough time to accomplish this requirement. Affected voters may have a trusted friend or family member who would be able to vote the ballot on their behalf and their voice should be heard.”

An alternative would be to allow for electronic voting, but Byrum stated that that would be less secure and would cause other problems when reviewing records.

“Using paper ballots is the most secure method of voting because elections can be easily audited and paper ballots cannot be hacked,” she said. “If proxy voting for those unable to mail a ballot in were to be allowed by Governor Whitmer, there would be a definitive paper trail and we would be able to ensure the accuracy of our elections through the auditing process.”

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