Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum works with other national leaders to improve military and overseas voting

Clerk Byrum attended the Overseas Voting Initiative conference by Council of State Governments in Puerto Rico

MASON – Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum (D-Onondaga) attended a conference for the Overseas Voting Initiative in San Juan, Puerto Rico last week. The event included a wide array of federal, state and local election experts and focused on solutions for common barriers to voting experienced by members of the military and those voting from overseas.

“The Overseas Voting Initiative has been an excellent chance to work with election leaders to ensure that we are enabling the right to vote for everyone,” stated Byrum. “The opportunity to compare notes and establish best practices with our military in mind has been invaluable, especially given the critical elections on the horizon.”

During the conference, Byrum had the opportunity to meet with service members at U.S. Coast Guard Sector San Juan and toured Coast Guard cutters crucial to intercepting drugs and human trafficking. Byrum also met with election officials from across the country to discuss the sustainability of balloting solutions with the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), data standardization and implementation, and cybersecurity, specifically relating to preparations for the 2020 elections and new federal legislation.

On cybersecurity, Byrum observed, “The U.S. Department of Homeland Security designated election technology as critical U.S. infrastructure which recognizes how seriously we must focus on elections. Given that the integrity of our electoral process is paramount, and the fact that bad actors are attempting to influence and interfere with our elections, it is vital that we employ all available safeguards to be certain that our election technology is secure. In Michigan, we retain physical, paper, copies of ballots so we can have paper trails and verify results.”

Following the conference, the Sustainability of UOCAVA Balloting Solutions Subgroup (SUBSS) released a report examining the different methods that various states and jurisdictions have used to implement and ensure voting for overseas voters. New methods and features examined include electronic ballot marking, the ability to send completed ballots via email, and digital signature verification. These and other methods that have been implemented have led to a 23% increase in successfully tabulated military and overseas ballots since 2006.
“The report shows how states have implemented UOCAVA, and discusses the progress that has been made in overseas voting,” Byrum explained, “In addition to the many success stories, the report also highlights significant barriers to implementation that my colleagues and I have been working to mitigate. There is still work to be done, but I am confident that through our continued effort, and the diligence of groups like the Sustainability Subgroup, we will overcome them.”


For more information, call (517) 676-7204.

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About Overseas Voting Initiative
In 2014, The Council of State Governments launched Overseas Voting Initiative, a four-year, $3.2 million program, with the U.S. Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program to improve the return rate of overseas absentee ballots. After the success of the initial program, in 2018 FVAP collaborated with CSG on a $3.9 million, five-year effort to help uniformed services personnel and other U.S. citizens overseas vote in federal elections. As part of this effort, OVI maintains a working group that examines two distinct areas pertinent to military and overseas voting: The Sustainability of UOCAVA Balloting Solutions and Data Standardization and Implementation. Through OVI, CSG continues to provide state policymakers, state and local election officials and other election community stakeholders with research and best practice guides to ensure the men and women of the U.S. military and Americans living overseas can enjoy the same right to vote as citizens living in the U.S. OVI is housed in the CSG Center of Innovation.

About The Council of State Governments
Founded in 1993, The Council of State Governments is our nation’s only organization serving all three branches of state government. CSG is a region-based forum that fosters the exchange of insights and ideas to help state officials shape public policy. This offers unparalleled regional, national and international opportunities to network, develop leaders, collaborate and create problem-solving partnerships.