

Senate passes bills to create state voting rights act

A package of bills to establish a state Voting Rights Act (VRA) received approval by the Senate this week on a partisan vote. While numerous positive changes have been made since their introduction, MTA remains opposed to two of the four bills due to several items of concern.



The main bill, [Senate Bill 401](#), sponsored by Sen. Darrin Camilleri (D-Brownstown Chtr. Twp.), would incorporate provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) and includes provisions beyond the federal requirements. Under the bill, a local government would be prohibited from imposing anything that leads to a disparity in voter participation between members of a protected class and other members of the electorate, or that would impair the ability of a protected class to participate in the political process. MTA opposes the current version as provisions could place an increased strain on local election officials, as well as increase liability and expense for local units of government. Among the election practices that are specifically included are the consolidation of precincts, location of drop boxes, polling places and early voting sites, and method of election (at large of ward/district-based). SB 401 would also establish a complaint process for individuals or groups who feel a local government is in violation of the provisions. The goal is to reach a consensus on how to remedy a potential violation with the approval of the Secretary of State (SOS). A fund would be established to cover the costs of responding to a complaint or for implementing an agreed-upon remedy, but not both. If a remedy cannot be achieved, the next step would be court proceedings, and the bill outlines what can and cannot be considered in court and what potential remedies may include. The court would have discretion in determining whether polarized voting exists in a community to the benefit of locals.

Potential remedies include adopting a different method of election, adding voting days or hours, adding polling places, early voting sites and drop boxes, or ordering a special election. Punitive damages could also be assessed. SB 401 also sets up a similar process to allow a disabled elector to submit a complaint if the local government in which they reside violated a state or federal law involving the rights of disabled electors.

If a local government is found to be in violation under the proposed act, the court could require court pre-approval of any changes to election policy for up to a 10-year period or for a monitor to be appointed for up to 10 years for violations related to the rights of disabled voters.

An advertisement for STG Municipal Web Design. At the top, the letters "STG" are in a white box. Below that, it says "MUNICIPAL Web Design". The main image is a screenshot of a website with various sections like "PUBLIC NOTICES" and "COMMUNITY". At the bottom, it says "VISIT US AT MTA'S REGIONAL SUMMITS!".

An advertisement for Plante Moran Cresa Realpoint. It features the company logo and the text "Comprehensive real estate solutions." and "LEARN MORE". The background is a blue-tinted image of a construction site with a crane.

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[Senate Bill 402](#), sponsored by Sen. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield), is supported by MTA as it would establish the Michigan Voting Database and Institute for the purpose of having one location for people to access voting data and information. The SOS would provide the institute with the voting data that local clerks already submit to the SOS. If the SOS requests any additional publicly available information for the institute, the local government would be reimbursed. The institute would also become the depository for any election-related data that it receives. If local governments were to receive a Freedom of Information Act request for this information, they could then refer the requester to the institute.

[Senate Bill 403](#), sponsored by Sen. Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit), would create the Language Assistance for Elections Act. The bill would require local governments that meet a certain threshold of voters with limited English proficiency to provide language assistance for elections. Until 2030, this threshold would be the same as the federal VRA. After 2030, that threshold would be lowered, requiring more communities to provide language assistance. The bill would require the SOS to notify those local governments that are affected and provide the translated election materials. In addition, SOS would be required to cover the additional costs for logic and accuracy testing. As amended, local clerks could choose any source for logic and accuracy testing. SB 403 also contains a similar complaint process to SB 401 for violations of this act. However, the only way a community could be in violation is if they do not use the resources provided by the SOS. MTA is neutral on the bill.

The final bill, [Senate Bill 404](#), sponsored by Sen. Erika Geiss (D-Taylor), would establish new notice requirements for certain election-related activities to the SOS. Additionally, the legislation would codify current policy of curbside voting for voters who are unable to enter a polling place or early voting site due to a disability. It would also allow a voter to bring another individual to provide language assistance in the voting booth if needed. SB 404 would also allow individuals or groups to provide food, drink, and warmth to those waiting in line to vote—inside and outside a polling location or early voting site. MTA opposes the current version.

MTA acknowledges many changes made are positive but remains concerned with some provisions that are beyond the federal VRA. Concerns exist that the process could be abused and nuisance/frivolous complaints will be submitted—requiring increased staffing time and expense and legal fees. The bills now go to the House for consideration.

Senate approves increase in public safety officer disabled/death benefit

The one-time benefit to families of public safety officers who lost their lives or become permanently disabled while on duty would double under [Senate Bill 834](#), sponsored by Sen. Kevin Hertel (D-St. Clair Shores). The legislation, approved by the Senate this week, would increase the current amount of benefit from \$25,000 to \$50,000 paid for a public safety officer who dies or is permanently and totally disabled in the line of duty. The one-time benefit was created in 2004 to help ease the burden when tragedy strikes these families but has not increased or been adjusted for inflation. The fund's balance is expected to cover any benefits in the upcoming fiscal year. The bill now goes to the House for

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consideration.



STC October course updates

All certified assessing officers must take the *2024 STC Updates* class as part of their continuing education renewal requirements for the renewal cycle, which began on Nov. 1, 2023, and ends Oct. 31, 2024. You can view a list of the [2024 STC Updates schedule for October](#). The Oct. 9, 2024, *STC Updates* course will be taught online using Zoom.

MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

THIS NOVEMBER

TREASURERS' GUIDE TO
Tax Collecting

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Conference to address Labor, Zoning and Housing in Rural Communities

You can [register](#) for a free conference that will address the challenges and opportunities facing rural economic development (*rural is defined as less than 200,000 population*). The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago is hosting [The Lay of the Land: Labor, Zoning and Housing in Rural Communities](#) conference on Oct. 9-10 in Des Moines, Iowa. The event will include a deeper discussion of how rural communities are attracting labor with the help of creative zoning and housing policies. Participants will gain valuable insights into trends, strategies and best practices that are shaping the future of rural communities. The conference program, conference meals and tour are free with a limited number of spaces; **participants must pay their own travel, lodging and non-conference meals.**

Grants for tree-planting projects available

Townships interested in planting trees to improve their community can apply for funding through the [DTE Energy Foundation Tree Planting Grant](#) program. Communities throughout the state served by DTE Electric and/or Gas can seek financial and technical assistance. Grant awards of up to \$4,000 with a one-to-one match requirement will be awarded, and projects must be completed by Sept. 1, 2025. Applications are due **Oct. 25** with awards to be announced in December. Access the application and instructions at [DTE Energy Tree Planting Grants](#).

Input from members sought on legislative policy platform

Township officials can review and provide input on the MTA's legislative policy platform. The legislative policy objectives guide the Association's government relations efforts and reflect emerging

issues and goals. MTA members are encouraged to review our [2024-25 Policy Platform](#) and share any proposed revisions and suggested additions by **Monday, Nov.**

4. Member-proposed policy changes are reviewed by MTA committees for word selection and legality, and to ensure they conform with the Association's overall goals and objectives. The proposed policies will be presented at the 2025 MTA Annual

Meeting in conjunction with our Annual Educational Conference in April. Contact legislation@michigantownships.org with questions, comments or suggestions.



Reminders from BOE

EPB training database. A new electronic pollbook (EPB) training database has been posted to the state Bureau of Election's (BOE) [eLearning Center](#) to support the hands-on training of election inspectors.

AV drop boxes. The drop box playlist—which includes the Drop Box Collection Form template, Absent Voter (AV) Drop Box Instructions, and Absent Voter Ballot Drop Box Requirements and Recommendations—is available in eLearning Center.

Oct. 7 deadlines for November election. Oct. 7 is the deadline to complete the following tasks: publish in the newspaper a notice of days and hours for voter registration at the clerk's office; post and enter into the Qualified Voter File (QVF) the hours the clerk's office will be open on the Saturday or Sunday (or both) immediately before Election Day, and any additional hours and locations if applicable, to issue and receive AV ballots. Clerks coordinating an early voting region should enter the locations, days, and hours for early voting sites no later than Oct. 7.

Michigan secure election experience. The Michigan Secure Election Experience is a set of materials designed to assist clerks with educating their constituents on how people, technology, and cross-checks keep our elections secure. Each county has been sent a set of posters (including stands), along with samples of two pocket guides, for any clerk to borrow for events. To order these materials (at no cost) for your township, work with your county. A link to the [supply order form](#) is in [eLearning](#).

Sept. 21-29 final Adopt-A-Highway clean-up

The Michigan Department of Transportation announced that Sept. 21-29 will be the final clean-up period for 2024. Motorists should be



aware of volunteer groups along the highway beginning Saturday. Sections of highway are available for adoption all over the state. Interested groups can get more information on joining the program at [Adopt-A-Highway](#).

Federal update for week of Sept. 16

Check out the National Association of Towns and Townships [Weekly Legislative Update](#) for an update of federal actions impacting townships.



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