

Testimony of Melvin Butch Hollowell

Election Committee, Michigan House of Representatives

April 17, 2012

Mr. Chairman, for the record, my name is Melvin Butch Hollowell, and I serve as General Counsel of the Detroit Branch NAACP, the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the United States. This year the Detroit Chapter, the nation's largest unit, celebrates its 100th year anniversary. And while, on behalf of the NAACP, I want to thank you and the Members of this Committee for the opportunity to comment on the package of bills before you, we do not celebrate these bills.

To the contrary, these bills, SB 751, SB 754, and SB 803 are an assault on minority voting rights in Michigan, and this is part of a national pattern and practice of trying to suppress the minority vote before the November 6 general election.

These bills are regressive in that they make voting harder. SB 751 adds new photo identification requirements. There has never been any evidence voter impersonation in Michigan. None. In fact, as then Secretary of State Candice Miller stated on October 20, 2000, "Michigan has a strong tradition of clean elections." And according to then Secretary of State Terry Lynn Land, nearly half a million of the state's 7 million registered voters currently do not have a drivers' license or a state identification card. Those who do not possess this identification are disproportionately the poor, the disabled, the elderly and persons of color.

SB 754's new regulations on making voting rights organizations such as the NAACP register with the Secretary of State's office for training before doing voter registration is a questionable at best requirement as there are no training standards in place.

SB 803 which imposes an affirmative statement of citizenship is completely unnecessary as Michigan law already provides that one must be a citizen in order to register. We note that the present Secretary of State's office, which has in the past been a neutral arbiter of elections, added a citizenship check box to the ballot, during the February 28 Republican Presidential primary election, without appropriate approvals. And Secretary Johnson's efforts to pry into citizenship data without probable cause has been justifiably opposed by the U.S. Department of

Justice, as it appears to be aimed at our partners in the Latino community, the state's fastest growing demographic.

SB 751 would place thousands of voters on inactive lists, subjecting them to automatic challenge if they vote by absentee ballot. We work hard to promote voting at every election. But when citizens vote is their choice and this state should erect such barriers. We note that this Secretary of State has already purged 30,000 names from the voter rolls. These tend to be the poor who have simply moved to a different address.

The right to vote is the most fundamental and precious right we have as Americans. It ensures that people are in charge of their government and not the other way around. The people of Michigan would be better served by making voting more convenient, not less, by embracing reforms like expanded early voting, no reason absentee voting, allowing students to vote on campus and same day registration.