

**Legislative Joint Memo of Support for
House Bill 4210 and Senate Bill 177
September 2023**

Our organizations collectively represent thousands of proud active duty military spouses, dependents, and veterans. We write in support of HB4210/SB177. If passed, this bill would reduce barriers to voting for eligible members of our community.

Voting in U.S. elections is a fundamental right for every U.S. citizen. Yet, the current system of voting leaves the ballot box inaccessible for many voters connected to military service. The military community has shockingly low voter participation rates. While 74% of the eligible civilian population voted in the 2020 presidential election, only 47% of uniformed service members and a mere 8% of overseas citizens did the same.¹ The logistics of receiving and returning an absentee ballot by mail are inherently cumbersome while stationed abroad or when frequently relocating to new duty stations domestically.

Last year, the Michigan Legislature passed the Uniformed Service Member Absentee Ballot Act, which extended electronic ballot return to eligible servicemembers. While we commend the Michigan Legislature for attempting to ease the voting process for service members, we were alarmed that this legislation omitted spouses and eligible dependents. According to the DoD, 50% of active duty service members are married and 92% of active duty spouses are women. Omitting spouses from this legislation disproportionately cuts women out of the local electoral process.

Electronic ballot return is already in use in a majority of states, including Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. Out of the 31 other states who already allow for electronic ballot submission for eligible voters – Michigan is the only state that omits military spouses and their dependents from the eligibility definition.

When military service members are stationed abroad or relocate to an out-of-state installation, many are accompanied by their families. This bill will expand “eligible members” to include spouses and correct submission disparity within military family units.

This bill will also remove the requirement for eligible voters to use DoD-verified electronic signatures. DoD-verified electronic signatures would require service members to use a Common Access Card (CAC) digital signature – a form of ID that is only provided to service members, as it includes their DoD identification number. Removing this requirement will enable spouses to

¹ Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) 2020 Report to Congress. *Available at* <https://www.fvap.gov/info/reports-surveys/2020-report-to-congress>

return their ballot electronically as well, without sacrificing security. No other state with electronic ballot return methods requires CAC authentication.

It is time for Michigan to join its neighbors and remove unnecessary obstacles to voting for military families. We urge you to support legislation to allow electronic ballot return to help members of the military community more easily participate in the very democracy we are committed to protect.

Sincerely,

Secure Families Initiative

Blue Star Families

Exceptional Families of the Military

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America

Military Officers Association of America

Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

The Rosie Network

United States Military Spouse Chamber of Commerce

We the Veterans and Military Families