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**Testimony of Allegan County Board Chair Jim Storey
Michigan House Committee on Elections and Ethics
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Good afternoon members of the Local Government Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Michigan Association of Counties, which I serve as an elected member of the Board of Directors, on Representative Bollin's bill HB 4937 and Representative Lightner's bill HB 4938, to extend to four years the term of office for county commissioners beginning with the general election in in 2022.

Before I offer my perspective on the House bills, I think it important to do a short historical refresh of the progression of term lengths as Michigan grew from a wilderness in "the west" to the Mighty Michigan we know today.

Allegan County, whom I serve as Board Chair, was organized in 1835, two years before Michigan's 1837 admission to the union, being paired with Arkansas. In the intervening years between then and now, the terms of office of local officials have been changed frequently to reflect changes in the make-up, development and complexity of our great state.

The 1850 Michigan Constitution fixed the terms of county officers – that is, the sheriff, clerk, register of deeds, treasurer and prosecutor – at two years. The Board of Supervisors, which was the predecessor body of today's Board of Commissioners, was elected every year.

The next Constitution, that of 1908, kept the county officers' terms at two years but expanded from one to two years the terms of the Board of Supervisors.

The current Constitution, that of 1963, expanded to four years the terms of the county officers and allowed the Board of Supervisors to choose whether to have two-year or four-year terms. As you know, most township boards have chosen to select four-year terms for their supervisors and other board members.

When county boards of supervisors were abolished and Boards of County Commissioners were created in 1966 as their replacement, the Legislature chose to fix their terms at two years. Thus, today's situation, where all other county officials except commissioners are elected to a four-year term, as are all township elected and most city councils or commissioners.

In the past 50 years, the functions of counties have grown exponentially. Where the focus was once just basic duties – such as jailing criminals, making and storing records and keeping agricultural drains flowing, a modern county, 175 years later, must also focus on road patrols; providing for indigent defense; operating mental health treatment and substance abuse prevention programs; providing for solid waste pick-up and disposal; ensuring food and water supplies are safe through well, sewer and food service permitting; operating parks; leading economic development efforts; exercising responsibility for emergency management and response due to natural and human-created disasters; and, most prominently, hiring and overseeing the work of a county administrator in those many counties who do not have an elected executive.

As the scope of services has expanded and deepened, the tasks expected of commissioners have also grown. When Boards of Supervisors were the norm, the primary task was adopting an annual budget and ensuring tax collection.

And, as the Citizens Research Council observed in its 2016 report, "Counties in Michigan: an Exercise in Regional Government," the tasks assigned to counties by either the state government or sought by cities, townships and villages is expected to grow even more as funding issues cause local government leaders to seek regional, rather than local, solutions.

In short, the administrative-legislative function exercised by county government, as the Citizens Research Council observed, is far more complex and detailed than when Michigan's founders set up our current system of local government.

The types of decisions we Commissioners are expected to make require study outreach to those many communities within our boundaries affected by our actions, and thoughtful consideration for the future that is best supported by a term of office longer than two years.

The very nature of the decisions we are expected to make are best developed when there is time to sift through all the information needed to wisely act in creating policy and deciding expenditures.

Then, too, there is the positive impact for county voters when deciding to whom they will entrust their government. By moving Commissioners to four-year terms, voters can focus their desired direction for their county at one election every four years, instead of making half-decisions biennially. It is also useful to consult with what Michigan's sister states in the Union

have chosen when deciding the term of office for a county commissioner. Michigan is one of only five states that limit all county commissioner terms to two years.

Expanding county commissioners' terms to four years would eliminate the problem of having commissioners repeatedly having to setting aside their work for their constituents in order to campaign every two years.

There are 622 county commissioners in Michigan's 83 counties. Think of tapping that brain power and experience to address the challenges all of us in public life face.

By allowing county commissioners to serve four rather than two years at a time, will help channel that combination of experience and brain power towards seeking solutions to our most vexing issues.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you and share my thoughts.