



Michigan General Assembly  
House Elections Committee  
February 28, 2023

Testimony of Carolyn Normandin  
ADL Michigan Regional Director

ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony **in support of HB 4127 and 4128**, bills that would prohibit possession of firearms at or within 100 feet of polling places, early voting sites, or absentee voting ballot boxes and at or within 100 feet of absentee ballot counting places when ballots are being processed.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats, including from white supremacists and other far-right violent extremists, producing research to inform the public, and working closely with our partners to effectively address and counter these threats. And, in connection with its mission to secure justice and fair treatment for all, ADL has consistently fought alongside our partners in strong support of voting rights and to safeguard democracy. Voting is a fundamental right, and protecting safe access to the ballot is critically important.

The threats and incidents that have marked recent elections across the country, including armed patrols of ballot drop boxes and armed individuals planning to converge on ballot-counting spaces, underscore the need for action. In 2020, two men who drove from Virginia to Philadelphia were arrested and convicted of firearm-related charges near a vote counting location.<sup>1</sup>

Even in the absence of actual violence, threats can lead to intimidation and a chilling effect on the exercise of individuals’ freedom to vote. Similarly, the presence of firearms at polling places or ballot boxes at voting times can also have an intimidating and chilling effect, which may undermine true access to the ballot.

It is past time to take basic steps to safeguard these civic spaces where core civil rights are exercised. Prohibiting the carrying of firearms into or very close to these spaces is an important step toward safeguarding these spaces and protecting Michiganders’ freedom to vote.

Moreover, doing so will protect the elected and unelected workers and volunteers who work at these sites and make it possible for Michiganders to exercise our fundamental rights. In recent years, threats against local elected officials have significantly increased. **According to an analysis by ADL and the Princeton Bridging Divides Initiative, between January 2020 and September 2022, there were 139 threats to election workers nationwide. Michigan accounted for 13% of this national number, recording more threats to election workers than all but two other states.**<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, a July 2022 public opinion poll in Michigan found that a 65 percent majority supports banning guns from polling and vote count locations.<sup>3</sup>

HB 4127 would close an important loophole in state law. It would prohibit bringing a firearm within 100 feet of a polling place or a ballot drop box. At a time of increased threats to voting rights and election workers, this provision is an essential step toward safeguarding the democratic process and access to the ballot.

Similarly, HB 4128 would prohibit carrying a firearm within 100 feet of a location where ballots are being counted. Together, these bills are an important step toward protecting Michiganders' freedom to vote, ensuring access to the polls, and helping keep Michiganders safe, while also preserving the democratic process.

### **ADL urges the House Elections Committee to give HB 4127 and 4128 favorable reports.**

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Winter, Ben Collins, Daniel Arkin, and Brandy Zadrozny. 2 men arrested near Philadelphia vote center had QAnon paraphernalia, AR-15 in car." *NBC News*. 6 November 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/2-men-detained-after-police-learn-possible-threat-philadelphia-vote-n1246774>

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Defamation League and Princeton Bridging Divides Initiative. "Threats and Harassment Against Local Officials Dataset." 20 October 2022. <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/documents/Threats%20and%20Harassment%20Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> GQR. "Strong Support for Efforts to Reduce Political Violence in Michigan." 21 July 2022. <https://assets.joycefdn.org/content/uploads/Michigan-PV-SOS-July-2022.pdf>