



March 16, 2016

House Elections Committee

Re: SB 776

Dear Committee members,

The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) is a coalition of more than 70 member organizations across the state, and we have major concerns with the direction that SB 776 takes our state. The right of voters in the state to petition and vote on initiatives, referendum of laws, and constitutional amendments is directly enumerated in our Constitution of 1963, and that right was enshrined in previous versions of the Constitution as well. SB 776 is a direct limitation on the rights of registered voters in the state that serves no true purpose.

Limiting the validity of a signature to 180 days serves no purpose in protecting our petition process. In the past, concerns over voter fraud and ensuring voters are registered was not an easy process, and having the ability to rebut validity was an important protection for both the state and the petitioners. Today we have the Qualified Voter list that is publically accessible and continually updated with corrected voter information. This allows both the state and the petitioners to easily ensure signatures are valid up to the date of filing.

In a time where our state government is under the microscope for being unresponsive to the citizens and for not being an open and transparent government, this limiting of citizens rights to engage with the government makes little sense. The state should instead be showing leadership by allowing the people to have their voices heard in a meaningful way.

This bill is a major limitation on the directly enumerated constitutional rights of our citizens, similar to any amendment under the federal Bill of Rights. Though limitations are needed on any right, those should be as minimal as possible and should focus on directly problems facing the state from an ambiguity in that enumerated right. We urge you to vote no on SB 776, as it is an unneeded limitation on a directly granted constitutional right.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean Hammond". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "S" and "H".

Sean Hammond
Deputy Policy Director