

DEMOCRATIC ACCESS

Topline Asks

Will you support a commitment that the County will participate in:

1. Expansion of the voting franchise, helping to ensure voters have access to the ballot and that registration is hassle-free?
2. Opposition to undemocratic practices such as partisan gerrymandering and roadblocks to full democratic participation?
3. Establishment of clerk relations to help with poll worker staffing, identifying accessibility and capacity needs in consideration of fulfilling the rights enshrined in Proposal 3 (of 2018)?
4. Working with partners (i.e. ACLU, etc.) to conduct 'know your rights' workshops and other voter education events, for the purpose of registering voters and collecting permanent absentee ballot sign-ups?

DEMOCRATIC ACCESS

Protection of the environment requires the protection of the democratic process.

If voters know the issues and the candidates but cannot cast their vote because they cannot get registered, they lack adequate transportation, there are too few polling stations available, or they must work long hours, then their voices have been effectively silenced and they have been stripped of their right to participate in our democracy. Fortunately, access to the democratic process in Michigan was vastly improved with the passage of Proposal 3 in 2018. At that time voters gained a number of improvements to their ability to vote, none more important than being allowed to vote by absentee ballot without having to provide a reason.

No-excuse absentee voting is thought to increase overall participation in elections by making voting more accessible for particular demographics. We know that the pollution caused by the production and use of fossil fuels has a disproportionate impact on the most disenfranchised citizens in Michigan. Enhancing their ability to vote by offering the easy registration included in Proposal 3 with no-excuse absentee voting offers them a real chance to impact their own futures.

Public education is needed to ensure citizens can exercise these options and cast their vote. Numerous community and citizen groups are working to help voters get registered and add their names to the permanent absentee ballot list. County and local municipal leaders are essential partners in this effort. They can ensure we have a voting system that works for all by educating voters about their rights well before Election Day.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Energy Burden

- Nationally, low-income households spend a larger portion of their income on home energy costs (e.g., electricity, natural gas, and other home heating fuels) than other households spend. This measure is often referred to as a household’s “energy burden.” One recent study found that low-income households face an energy burden three times higher than other households. [5]
- A new study of Low-Income Energy Efficiency Opportunities finds that increasing investments in comprehensive energy efficiency services for low-income families would benefit everyone by creating healthier and more resilient communities, saving energy, and lowering bills for customers who need it most. [6]
- The more than 36 million U.S. households with incomes below twice the federal poverty level (\$49,200 for a family of four) use more than 30 percent of U.S. residential electricity and comprise 27 percent of U.S. households. Yet, the Consortium for Energy Efficiency estimates that, as of 2015, only 6 percent (\$350 million) of U.S. electric energy efficiency spending was dedicated to low-income programs. [7]
- In Colorado, nearly 400 households enrolled in low-income solar projects save between 15 and 50 percent on their electricity bills. [8]

Jobs and Economic Programs

- In Pontiac, 35.7% live in poverty, according to census data. More than half of the city's children are in poverty. The median household income is \$28,505. [9] As a result, clean energy and affordability programs can make a huge difference.
- Utility shutoffs are a reality for those living in poverty. A report to the Michigan Public Service Commission last week showed more than 1.6 million DTE electric and gas accounts were more than 90 days past due at the end of the first quarter and more than 50,000 were disconnected for nonpayment. And that was even before the impact of the virus had even been felt. [10]
- Washington, D.C.’s new Solar for All program, which aims to help 100,000 low-income households slash their energy bills in half by 2032, recently awarded \$13 million in grants for community solar and similar projects. And in New York state, a new initiative will cover the enrollment fees and other costs for 7,000 low-income households to join community solar projects. [11]
- Some solar developers also incorporate job training and hiring into their projects. In Minnesota, the nonprofit developer Cooperative Energy Futures works with groups like Renewable Energy Partners to provide on-the-job training for local workers, who could go on to get employment in one of the nation’s fastest growing industries. [12]

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Pollution

- There is no safe level of lead. Service lines do not have to be disrupted to deliver an elevated level of lead into a home's water supply. All lead lines must be replaced over the next two decades. The 90th percentile of the sample results must be below the lead action level of 15 ppb, or 12 ppb starting in 2025, for corrosion control to be considered effective. An estimated 500,000 lead service lines still exist in Michigan's homes, each presenting a public health threat. [13]
- Poor air quality remains the largest environmental health risk in the United States. In fact, with 100,000 deaths per year, more Americans die from air pollution than car crashes and murders combined. [14]
- Despite consuming less, BIPOC communities are consistently exposed to higher levels of air pollution than wealthier, whiter neighborhoods. There is a significant gap in pollution burden versus consumption by race in the United States. [15]

Reference Links

1. <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>
2. The Quest for Environmental Justice (1994), Dr. Robert Bullard, Sierra Club Press
3. <https://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/climate/actions-strategies/climate-strategies/strategic-climate-action-plan/2020-SCAP-update.aspx>
4. <https://www.washtenaw.org/2845/Environmental-Council>
5. https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2019/01/f58/WIP-Energy-Burden_final.pdf
6. https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/documents/liee_national_summary.pdf
7. Ibid.
8. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/energy-equity-bringing-solar-power-to-low-income-communities#:~:text=Revenues%20from%20the%20solar%20electricity,arrays%20can%20provide%20additional%20benefits.>
9. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2018/05/12/pontiac-poverty-millennials-comback-detroit/499356002/>
10. <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1063189771>
11. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/energy-equity-bringing-solar-power-to-low-income-communities#:~:text=Revenues%20from%20the%20solar%20electricity,arrays%20can%20provide%20additional%20benefits.>
12. Ibid.
13. <https://www.greenmdp.com/resources>
14. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/03/11/air-pollution-inequality-minorities-breathe-air-polluted-whites/3130783002/>
15. Ibid.