

## CONSOLIDATION OF ELECTION PRECINCTS

Phone: (517) 373-8080  
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

**House Bill 4068 (reported from committee as Substitute H-1)**  
**Sponsor: Rep. Henry Yanez**  
**Committee: Elections**

Analysis available at  
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

**Complete to 2-11-15**

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The bill would allow local units to consolidate election precincts during certain statewide elections at which a constitutional amendment or other question is on the ballot, but only in precincts having polling places located in the same building. The bill will apply to the upcoming May 5, 2015, election at which voters will face not only local matters but also the proposal to amend the constitution to raise the sales tax as part of a comprehensive proposal to increase road funding, among other things.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The bill would have an indeterminate yet potential positive fiscal impact on state and local governments. Local municipalities could reduce their costs for certain statewide elections if they decided to consolidate election precincts. This would also impact the state, which does reimburse local governments the costs involved in certain types of elections (i.e. presidential primaries, statewide ballot initiatives). The actual potential fiscal impact involved cannot be calculated, since it is unknown how many precincts would be consolidated in upcoming statewide elections and how much would be saved in reduced costs as a result of those consolidations.

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

In December 2014 the Michigan legislature passed a series of bills known as the transportation package—in all 11 bills and two resolutions—aimed at increasing funding for road construction, among other things. The cornerstone of the package is a resolution to increase the state sales tax from six percent to seven percent.

Michigan's sales tax rate is set in the state constitution. Any change in that rate must be approved by Michigan voters at a statewide election. That election is set for May 5, 2015—the customary date for Michigan's local spring elections.

To save money, municipal clerks have the authority to consolidate precincts in local elections, and they sometimes do so if they anticipate voter turnout will be low. State law requires at least three election workers in each precinct. When a precinct is consolidated with another, it reduces personnel costs. For example, the Warren City Clerk has testified that generally the city has 53 precincts, but only 36 locations where voters cast their ballots. For local elections the city clerk can reduce the number of precincts from 53 to 35, while retaining the 36 locations for polling places. Doing so saves the city taxpayers between \$25,000 and \$35,000 that need not be spent to hire temporary election workers.

In contrast to municipal elections, state law prohibits the consolidation of precincts during statewide elections. Consequently, precincts cannot be consolidated in the May 2015 local spring election because voters' ballots will also contain a statewide ballot proposal—known as Proposal 1-2015—to raise the sales tax, in order to fund road repair.

Legislation has been introduced to allow (but not require) local clerks to consolidate their election precincts for certain statewide elections, if the statewide election is one in which a constitutional amendment (or other question) is to be put before voters.

### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

House Bill 4068 (H-1) would amend the Michigan Election Law to allow the consolidation of election precincts during certain statewide elections at which a constitutional amendment or other question is on the ballot, but only in precincts having polling places located in the same building.

Now under the law, local election commissioners may, by passing a resolution, consolidate the election precincts for a particular election, but not if that election is the November general election or its primary, or *other statewide* or federal elections. House Bill 4068 (H-1) would retain this provision, but modify it to remove "other statewide" elections. Further, the bill specifies that for a statewide special election (but not a November general election or its primary) that is called to submit a proposed constitutional amendment or other question to the electors, an election commission would be authorized to consolidate only those precincts having polling places located in the same building.

Finally, Michigan Election Law now allows election commissioners in counties, cities, *wards*, townships, *villages*, *metropolitan districts*, or *school districts* to consolidate election precincts, after taking into consideration the (1) number of voter choices, (2) the percentage of registered voters who voted in the last similar election, and (3) the intensity of interest in the coming election. However, the law prohibits consolidated precincts having more than 5,000 active voters. Further, the consolidation of precincts must be done at least 60 days before the election, and unless the polling places of the consolidated precincts are located in the same building, then notice must be mailed to or posted for voters. House Bill 4068 (H-1) would retain all of these provisions but update the statute to eliminate references to *ward*, *village*, *metropolitan district*, and *school district* election commissions. Under current practice, local elections are run by clerks and election commissions in counties, cities, and townships.

MCL 168.659

### ***ARGUMENTS:***

#### ***For:***

This legislation will allow local election clerks to consolidate voting precincts for the May 5, 2015, election, which will save taxpayers money. Local clerks can trim election costs by hiring fewer temporary election workers when they consolidate their precincts. For

example, the DeWitt Charter Township Clerk cites her ability to reduce seven precincts to three, without requiring voters to go to a location different from their regular polling place. Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the Warren City Clerk notes his ability to reduce from 53 to 35 the number of precincts in the city, while retaining all 36 polling places, saving taxpayers between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

This bill will allow local clerks to consolidate their precincts during certain statewide elections—a consolidation that is currently prohibited by law. In particular, local clerks could (but would not be required to) consolidate voting precincts for the May 5, 2015, special election at which citizens statewide will vote on a proposed sales tax increase—from six percent to seven percent—that is part of a comprehensive proposal to raise additional money to fund construction and repair of roads and bridges, among other things. For a description of the entire proposal, see:  
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2013-2014/billanalysis/House/pdf/2013-HLA-HJRUU-5192F1A2.pdf>

***POSITIONS:***

The Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks supports the bill. (2-11-15)

The City of Warren supports the bill. (2-11-15)

The Warren and Macomb County Clerks support the bill. (2-11-15)

The DeWitt Charter Township Clerk supports the bill. (2-11-15)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault  
Fiscal Analyst: Perry Zielak

---

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.