



Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson

Serving and Protecting the Military Community

In conjunction with National Military Appreciation Month, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson has announced plans to better serve and protect our military community.

As a military spouse to a U.S. Army combat veteran, Secretary Benson feels a personal responsibility to ensure state government is doing all it can every day to honor the services and sacrifices of our state's military service members, veterans and their families.

Improving Access to Democracy

Those serving overseas should be able to participate fully in our democracy without significant barriers or obstacles. Secretary Benson proposes the following to ensure the votes of our service members and their families are counted and that they have convenient, secure access to the vote.

LEGISLATIVE COLLABORATION

- **Ensure the votes of our military service members and their families count.**
 - Allow absentee ballots to be counted after Election Day, as long as they are post-marked by Election Day and received in time for canvassing.
- **Facilitate electronic ballot return for military voters.**
 - Allow military members serving overseas to return their ballots by electronic means.
 - Extend e-return privileges to military spouses.
 - Work to ensure that the technological infrastructure is safe, secure and implemented in a timely manner.
- **Treat Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots (FWAB) submitted by unregistered but eligible overseas and uniformed services voters as both a registration form and a ballot if received by Election Day.**
 - With the enactment of Promote the Vote constitutional amendment in 2018, Michigan voters now can register up through Election Day at city and township clerks' offices. Military and overseas voters should be allowed to register and to vote in federal elections by submitting a FWAB by Election Day.

NEW DEPARTMENT OF STATE INITIATIVES

- **Expand the number of voter registration agencies and voter registration drives in the military community through collaboration with the Michigan National Guard, Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs.**
 - Currently, recruitment offices of the U.S. armed forces serve as voter registration agencies. Working in partnership, the state and federal government could expand the number of offices where these services are available or designate the entire department as a voter registration agency.
- **Improve ballot tracking tools for military and overseas voters to track their ballots and their ballot applications online.**
 - Implement ballot tracking tools that give military and overseas voters access to real-time, detailed online information about the status of their ballot and ballot applications.
- **Create a portal for the military community at Michigan.gov/MilitaryVoting.**
 - This web portal will include important election information for military service members and their families and an interface for them to have their questions answered by the Bureau of Elections.

Recognizing Veterans' Service and Sacrifice

Historically, the Michigan Department of State has served veterans by attending local events, emphasizing service-themed plates and creating a veteran designation for licenses and ID cards. The department also annually creates large lobby displays in the Austin building and secondary complex in November for Veterans Day, featuring pictures and descriptions of employees and their family members who have served.

Secretary Benson will expand these practices with opportunities for both legislative and community engagement.

LEGISLATIVE COLLABORATION

- **Eliminate the charge for military license plates.**
 - Campaign and Service Medal Veteran plates are available for veterans who have served in Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam. Veterans must provide their Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty form (DD-214) indicating a medal award to qualify for a Campaign or Service Medal Veteran plate.
 - Veteran plates cost an additional \$5. Secretary Benson supports waiving this \$5 plate charge. The anticipated loss in revenue (\$170,000) would be made up through department-wide efficiencies.

- **Support development of new plates.**
 - *Blue Star Families*: People serving in the military and their immediate family members would be eligible for this plate.
 - *Women Veterans*: A plate to honor female veterans.

NEW DEPARTMENT OF STATE INITIATIVES

- **Thank veterans in our branch offices.**
 - Department of State employees and/or family members who are veterans will be featured at branch offices, including a description of service and a special thank you from Secretary Benson.
 - In the future, the department will expand this program to invite public participation in branch offices across the state.

- **“Honor a veteran with your vote”**
 - Beginning in 2020, Michigan residents will join Americans from 13 other states with a new “Honor a veteran with your vote” program. This will be an opportunity for Michigan residents to pay tribute to a veteran or active duty service member by submitting a dedication to the Secretary of State. Dedications will be featured on the Secretary of State website, and dedicators as well as honorees will be able to print a certificate of dedication or receive a button in the mail to wear on Election Day along with their “I voted” sticker.
 - In states across the country, this is a meaningful way for citizens to show their appreciation for individuals who have served to protect our basic liberties, including the right to vote.

Military Voting and Appreciation Legislative Sponsors

State legislators agreed to sponsor bills proposed by Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson to improve the military community's access to democracy and recognize veterans' service and sacrifice.

The package of bills will:

- Eliminate the \$5 fee for the various types of veteran license plates.
- Create new license plates.
- Make it easier for military members and their spouses to vote (providing for secure electronic ballot return).

Rep. Vanessa Guerra (D-Saginaw) – Will introduce legislation to allow military, military spouse and disabled e-voting.

Sen. Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia) – Will introduce legislation to create a Women Veterans license plate.

Sen. Kevin Daley (R-Lum) – Introduced Senate Bill 118 earlier this year to create a Blue Star Families plate. Secretary Benson supports this legislation.

Rep. Joe Tate (D-Detroit) – Section 257.803e: Would eliminate \$5 fee for gold star family member plates.

Rep. Jewell Jones (D-Inkster) – Section 257.803i: Would eliminate \$5 fee for national guard, military reserve or armed services plates.

Rep. Gary Howell (R-North Branch) – Section 257.803j: Would eliminate \$5 fee for Korean War plates.

Rep. Hank Vaupel (R-Fowlerville) – Section 257.803k: Would eliminate \$5 fee for Vietnam War plates.

Sen. John Bizon (R-Battle Creek) – Section 257.803l: Would eliminate \$5 fee for World War II plates.

Rep. Terry Sabo (D-Muskegon) – Section 257.803n: Would eliminate \$5 fee for plates including national guard, reserve or branch of armed services during specific wars (Persian Gulf) or conflicts (Grenada, Panama, Lebanon).

Sen. Adam Hollier (D-Detroit) – Section 257.803o: Would eliminate \$5 fee for plates including national guard, reserve or branches of armed services called to active duty during declared war or armed conflict.