

# City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRESIDENT BRENDA JONES

January 8, 2016

## **COUNCIL PRESIDENT BRENDA JONES:** **STATEMENT ON SENATE BILLS 571 and 13**



Governor Snyder recently signed **Senate Bill 571** into law, changing political activity in the state of Michigan. This bill, which amends 1976 PA388, prohibits government and local elected officials from using government funds or resources to inform or educate the public on ballot issues 60 days before a general election.

Passed in the Senate by a 25-12 vote on Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015, it was noted that the initial SB571 was 12 pages long when introduced out of the House Committee on Elections on December 9<sup>th</sup>, but increasingly grew to 53 pages when the Republican Caucus reviewed it on December 16<sup>th</sup> and had it approved by the Senate without any Democratic amendments. According to the Daily News, "Republicans cleared the Senate chamber of Democratic staffers and locked the senators inside the chambers." On Wednesday, January 7, 2016, Gov. Snyder then signed SB 571 into law.

### **Other Language added to SB 571 includes:**

- A provision barring public bodies from using public funds to distribute information about a local ballot proposal 60 days before it appears on the ballot
- The elimination of a February filing deadline for independent and political committees
- A requirement for political and independent committees to file annual reports
- The clarification that robocalls have to identify who is paying for the call and include some contact information, but do not have to use a disclaimer (the words "authorized by" or "not authorized by")
- An allowance for candidates to use contributions to pay down debts from previous election cycles

*(See reverse side for additional information)*

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**Q: How does this bill affect elected officials like Council President Brenda Jones?**

**A:** As the law currently states, "a public body (I.e. City Council), or a person acting for a public body, shall not, during the period 60 days before an election in which a local ballot question appears on a ballot, use public funds or resources for a communication by means of radio, television, mass mailing, or pre-recorded telephone message if that communication references a local ballot question and is targeted to the relevant electorate where the local ballot question appears on the ballot."

Council President Jones, along with many other elected officials, will still be able to explain and educate City of Detroit residents on many complex ballot questions, thereby simplifying their understanding of the issues. However, she will not advise residents how they should vote, as this is not her normal practice. *note point*

When the Council President attends any meeting with the public, she may speak freely – as an elected official with legislative responsibilities. However, she cannot use traditional means of mass communication, such as sending a newsletter or email to constituents, explaining ballot initiatives within 60 days of the election. In addition, her comments may not be taped or recorded, as these might be unknowingly communicated in mass messages at a later date.

Secondly, on the same day, Governor Snyder also signed into law **Senate Bill 13**, eliminating straight ticket voting. The bill amends the Michigan Election Law to:

- Delete provisions that allow voters to cast a straight ticket or a split ticket in the partisan section of the general election ballot
- Prohibit ballot labels in partisan elections from including a position allowing electors to vote for all of the candidates of one party by a single selection.

**Q. How does this affect voters in Detroit and throughout the entire state of Michigan?**

**A.** Detroit voters, along with voters around the state of Michigan, will have to check each individual box on the ballot and take the time to read and vote the entire ballot. State law allows a limitation to be placed on the amount of time you have to vote in a voting booth. In Detroit, it is limited to 5 minutes and this new provision could affect a voter's ability to complete the ballot. As a member of the Detroit Election Commission, I will seek ways to assist voters through this change and continue discussion to address the 5 minute limit.

## IN CONCLUSION

As your elected official, Detroit City Council President and the "Citizen's Voice," I wanted to take this time to point out a few noteworthy things that directly affect my constituents in Detroit, along with the entire state of Michigan. Please read the information carefully and feel free to contact myself, your State Representatives and/or Senators for any clarity necessary. However, these amendments underscore the need to encourage residents to vote and ensure THEIR VOICE is heard at the polls.