



Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote- Michigan

## **Statement Regarding Michigan SB 754**

November 21, 2011

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote – Michigan is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that serves the Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) community through civic participation, advocacy, and education. At 2.97% of Michigan’s population, our state’s 293,766 APIAs<sup>1</sup> are the fastest-growing population while other populations are declining.

Our mission is to serve the APIA community through civic participation, advocacy, and education. In our relatively short history, we have registered approximately 1500 individuals to vote, the vast majority from the APIA community. The APIA community faces many challenges to participating in our country’s democracy – language barriers, lack of familiarity with the political process, and, sometimes, distrust of government due to the history of home country political corruption.

For that reason, APIA community voter registration rates tend to hover around 50-60 percent, significantly lower than that of other communities. Once registered, APIA voters do turn out to vote at high rates. It is clear that the assistance APIAVote-Michigan and other nonprofit organizations provide to potential voters in taking the first step to complete the voter registration form and in providing information about the election process and voting rights is critical.

Now, Senate Bill 754 has been introduced in Michigan. This piece of legislation makes it more difficult for organizations to increase civic participation and engage residents in the democratic process. SB 754 goes against what the United States stands for by creating barriers to involvement in democracy and the organizations that strive to make this possible for marginalized communities across the state. APIAVote-Michigan opposes unnecessary impediments to a constitutional right for all citizens.

The bill mandates that organizations engaged in voter registration efforts provide an extensive amount of information, including the name and address of every agent of the organization who is helping to register voters in Michigan. Any changes in the information they submit must be reported promptly to the Department of State as well.

In addition, someone from the organization will be required to attend a training developed by the Secretary of State, and is then required to train all other members of the organization registering voters. The bill does not specify where or how the trainings will be offered, making them vague and presumably inaccessible.

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<sup>1</sup> Includes Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander – both alone and multiracial. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

Lastly, voter registration forms gathered by the organization within a week of an election must be turned in to the election authorities within one business day. These requirements are arduous stipulations adding an unreasonable burden to small nonprofits like ours who rely mostly on volunteers to increase the voter registration and participation rate in our community.

The state of Michigan would be better served and represented by bills that support the democratic process rather than those that create barriers to equitable participation.

For more information about APIAVote-Michigan, visit [www.apiaivotemi.org](http://www.apiaivotemi.org).

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