

EXHIBIT 1

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Michigan to combat claims of possible suppression of voters

*BY SUZETTE HACKNEY and KATHLEEN GRAY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS*

Even as voter turnout in the Nov. 4 presidential election is expected to reach record levels, fear -- fed by rumor, innuendo and misinformation -- is running high that droves of eligible voters in Michigan and other battleground states could be turned away or tricked into not voting.

Suggestions of a massive Republican-led effort to suppress the Democratic vote -- mainly in urban areas of battleground states -- are rampant on liberal talk radio, the Internet and the streets of Detroit, Flint, Saginaw and Benton Harbor.

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights, which has been inundated with complaints and questions, will roll out a massive advertising campaign starting Monday and running until Election Day to inform voters of their rights and to try to dispel misinformation.

Among the myths on the streets: Voters will be turned away or ballots tossed out if they wear T-shirts supporting a candidate, have been convicted of a felony, foreclosed on their house, filed bankruptcy, owe child support, don't have valid photo identification, or have outstanding warrants or unpaid parking tickets.

None of these are true.

Civil rights department officials say they are alarmed because Democratic nominee Sen. Barack Obama's campaign and its surrogates attracted and registered record numbers of new, inexperienced and minority voters before the Oct. 6 deadline.

"There seems to be an extreme amount of confusion too close to this election," said Trevor Coleman, spokesman for the department. "We also expect there to be some serious challenging at the polls, and we want people to know what their rights are."

Republicans say there's good reason to challenge some voters. They say they believe many new voters may be ineligible, citing investigations in several states into questionable registration efforts by the community activist organization ACORN.

Democratic officials are concerned that the challenge process could intimidate some voters and discourage others by slowing down long voting lines.

This could be the first year that 5 million Michiganders vote in an election. In the 2004 presidential election, 4.9 million voted -- a record number, but at 64.7%, it's far below the 72.7% who voted in the 1960 presidential election.

The state had 7.2 million registered voters at the end of July. Officials have not finished counting the new voters registered the last few months.

Republicans sent more than 4,000 challengers to 1,800 polling places across the state in 2004 and

are expected to head a similar effort this year.

Michigan GOP spokesman Bill Nowling, said the party isn't planning to specifically challenge ACORN-registered voters because there isn't an efficient way to determine which organization registered each voter.

But in cities with large minority populations, such as Detroit and Southfield, where GOP challengers are most prevalent, clerks have said that legitimate challenges of voters are rare.

"I have worked very closely with challengers in Southfield," Southfield Clerk Nancy Banks said. "And I've always told them, if they intimidate the voter or cause disruption in the precincts or create any type of uncomfortable situation, we will call the police."

Perhaps the most persistent rumor of the election season has been that Republican challengers will use foreclosure lists to attempt to challenge whether voters are casting ballots in the precinct where they live. The Republican Party has repeatedly denied any such plans, which were first reported by a liberal blog.

Banks said she got a call from a distressed woman in Bloomfield Hills whose home was in foreclosure, but she was still in her home. She said she was terrified that she would be pulled out of line at the polls and embarrassed in front of neighbors.

"I told her that there is no such law that if a house is foreclosed that you cannot vote," she said. "But I also told her that if you are in that situation and want to avoid any potential conflict at the polls to vote absentee."

The Obama campaign and Democratic National Committee has filed a lawsuit to prohibit the use of foreclosure lists, and GOP nominee Sen. John McCain has condemned the practice.

"Gov. Palin and I absolutely reject any plan to challenge voter eligibility based on lists of foreclosed homes," McCain wrote in a letter to U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit, the House Judiciary Committee chairman who had raised concerns about the issue. "I do not believe there is any credible evidence any such plan ever existed in Michigan or elsewhere."

State election director Chris Thomas said last week that a foreclosure list alone does not provide sufficient evidence for partisan challengers to question voters' eligibility on Election Day.

The state House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill last week that prohibits challengers from using foreclosure lists to question voters' eligibility without any other evidence. The state Senate, which has only two days of work tentatively scheduled before Nov. 4, is expected to consider the bill, but probably not before the election, said Matt Marsden, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop of Rochester.

The Election Assistance commission, a federal agency that studies the conduct of elections, said in a 2006 report -- which also included the 2004 presidential election -- that there were plenty of allegations of fraud and intimidation, especially in swing or battleground states, but little evidence to back up the allegations.

The national Commission on Federal Election Reform reviewed 55,000 calls made to a voter hotline on Election Day 2004 -- 44% of those calls had to do with voter registration or polling place issues, another 24% were concerns about absentee voting and 5% were calls about voter intimidation or harassment.

But Heaster Wheeler, executive director of the Detroit branch of the NAACP, said his nonpartisan organization is gearing up to protect voters who will, for the first time, cast votes for an African-American presidential candidate on a major party ticket.

"We're very clear about the historicity of this moment," Wheeler said. "There shall be no intimidation -- Detroit will be ready, and southeast Michigan will be ready. Anybody who wants to monitor this election is welcome because we, too, will be there to monitor the monitors."

Contact **SUZETTE HACKNEY** at 313-222-6614 or shackney@freepress.com.
