

# Queer the Vote:

## Michigan Democracy Toolkit

NATIONAL  
LGBTQ  
TASK FORCE



### Calendar

Outside of absentee ballots, which can be filed from their date of release up until the date of the respective election, the state of Michigan **does not** have early voting—so save the dates!

**Monday,**

**July 9, 2018:**

Last day to register to vote and to change political party affiliations for state primary elections.

**Tuesday,  
August 7, 2018:**

State Primary Election.

**Tuesday,  
October 9, 2018:**

Last day to register to vote for the General Election.

**Tuesday,  
November 6,  
2018:**

General Election Day.

**REMEMBER: Michigan has voter photo ID laws. You must present picture ID at the polls.** If you forget your photo ID, you must sign an *affidavit* that you are not in possession of identification. **Once you have signed an affidavit, you are eligible to vote and your vote will be counted.**

### Voting Information

#### *Registering to vote in Michigan*

The more we vote, the more we make our voices heard. If you're registered, take someone you know who isn't and walk them through the process. Find folks in your community who aren't registered to vote and help them register.

For LGBTQ people, poor people, people of color, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses, voting is the way we can make it clear to every politician that our rights matter. Voting in all elections—local, state, special, national, general—means safer, more democratic communities, with greater choice and greater impact on the lives of all.

- To register to vote in the state of Michigan, you must be:
  - A U.S. citizen
  - At least 18 years of age by Election Day
  - A resident of the state of Michigan
  - A resident of the city or township where you applying to register to vote
- Those Michigan citizens who are **currently being held in jail or prison** awaiting trial or arraignment **are able to vote!** However, if you are **currently serving** your sentence in jail or prison, you **cannot vote during your period of confinement.**

- ALL PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN RELEASED AFTER SERVING THEIR PRISON SENTENCE ARE FREE TO PARTICIPATE IN MICHIGAN ELECTIONS WITHOUT RESTRICTION. **Know your rights!**

## How to register to vote

### Getting the Application

- You can download and print a voter registration application [online](#).
- You can **pick up a hard copy** at your local Secretary of State (SOS) branch office; your local county, city, or township clerk's office; offices of state agencies (ex: the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Licensing and Regulatory affairs); military recruitment centers; or voter registration drives.
- If you are living **outside the US**, you may send in a Federal Postcard Application to register to vote, which is available through U.S. embassies and military bases. This will also serve as a way to request an absentee ballot.

**ALERT! THE SAME ADDRESS YOU USE ON YOUR MICHIGAN DRIVER'S LICENSE/PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION CARD MUST BE USED ON YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION FORM.** If these two addresses do not match, the Secretary of State will change the address listed on your driver's license/personal ID card to match the residence address on your voter registration form.

### Turning in the Application

- **Hand Delivery:** If you hand deliver your application to your SOS branch office or city, county, or township clerk's office, no other documentation necessary.
- **U.S. Mail:** If it is your first time registering to vote in Michigan and you mail in your application, you must **appear to vote in person** in the **first election** in which you wish to vote (*unless you are 60+ years old or have a disability*) **AND either:**
  - Write in your driver's license number or personal identification card number where requested upon the form

**OR**

  - When you mail in the form, you can put a **photocopy (NOT the original)** of either your driver's license, personal ID card, or a **photocopy (NOT the original)** of a paycheck stub, utility bill, or a bank or government document which lists **both** your name and your address, into the envelope.

**DO NOT SEND THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT!**

When your application is processed, your city/township clerk will mail you a voter registration card. This card will tell you the location of the polling place where you will be voting.

## How to Vote in Michigan

Your polling place will be listed on your voter registration card. **REMEMBER: MICHIGAN HAS VOTER ID LAWS. WHEN YOU GO TO VOTE ON ELECTION DAY, YOU NEED TO BRING PHOTO ID WITH YOU.** If you do not have photo ID, or you forget to bring it with you, you can sign an **affidavit** that you are a resident of the state of Michigan. This will ensure your vote is counted.

Acceptable forms of photo ID in Michigan are:

- Michigan driver's license
- Michigan personal ID card
- Driver's license or personal ID card issued by another state
- Federal or state government-issued photo ID
- U.S. passport
- Military ID card with photo
- Student ID card with photo from high school or an accredited institution of higher education
- Tribal ID card with photo

If you don't have a driver's license or other acceptable photo ID, you can get a state ID card at your local SOS branch office for \$10. For those **65 and older**, those people who are **blind**, or those **who have had their driving privileges revoked** due to physical or mental illness, this fee will be waived. Proof of identity and residency (such as a pay stub listing your name and address) is required to apply for a state ID card.

Your name can be **shortened** on your ID (for example, from "Katherine" to "Kathy") and it *will not disqualify you from voting*.

## The Battles We Fight: Current Voting Rights Issues in Michigan

In the United States, there are fewer voting rights in 2018 than there were in 1965.<sup>i</sup> If you are LGBTQ, if you are a person of color, if you are poor, if you have been convicted of a crime, if you do not carry a state ID, if you have a disability or a mental illness, it is now far more difficult and far more complicated to exercise your right to vote in the United States than it has been for more than thirty years. For LGBTQ people, along with people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses, making voting rights equitable and available to all is one of the most important battles we can fight.

### Literacy

In 2016, a class action lawsuit<sup>ii</sup> (a suit on behalf of a group or *class* of people) was filed against Governor Rick Snyder and a dozen other Michigan state officials on behalf of elementary schoolers who had been deprived of their right to literacy due to the systemic failures of the Detroit, MI school system.<sup>iii</sup>

Since 2011, the Detroit Public Schools Community District has been under the control of an Emergency Manager, much like the city of Flint.<sup>iv</sup> Until 2016, it even had the *same Emergency Manager* as Flint, MI.<sup>v</sup>

The lawsuit included suggestions for literary reforms, preventative checks to ensure no student graduated without proper literacy rates, and requests for funding to rebuild Detroit's public schools.<sup>vi</sup>

On June 29, 2018, a federal judge ruled that while literacy is important, it was not a fundamental right for children.<sup>vii</sup> “Simply finding one’s way through many aspects of ordinary life stands as an obstacle to one who cannot read,” he wrote in his opinion. “But those points do not necessarily make access to literacy a fundamental right.”<sup>viii</sup>

Public schools in Detroit overwhelmingly serve low-income children of color.<sup>ix</sup> This decision came at a time when Michigan announced new policy requiring that all third-graders who do not pass the Michigan Student Test of Education Progress to be held back a year, beginning in the 2019-2020 school year.<sup>x</sup> Last year, only 44% of Detroit third-graders passed the test.<sup>xi</sup>

### ***Why should we care?***

- Literacy rates and voting rates are connected. Historically and today, literacy tests have been used to exclude people of color, people with disabilities or mental illnesses, and people who are poor from being voting.<sup>xii</sup>
- In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 2002, only 55% of people with the lowest (Level 1) literacy rates (able to fill out simple forms in most cases) had voted in the previous five years, compared to 80% of those with Level 4 literacy (capable of comprehending complex/lengthy passages of prose) and 90% of those with Level 5 (the top level) literacy skills.<sup>xiii</sup>
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 abolished poll taxes and literacy tests,<sup>xiv</sup> but literacy rates still impact voting, income, and jobs.<sup>xv</sup> For example, in Michigan, candidates for police officers must pass the MCOLES Reading and Writing Test before becoming full officers.<sup>xvi</sup>
- When literacy is not regarded as a fundamental right for our children, all people—LGBTQ people, people of color, people with disabilities or mental illnesses, and especially people who are poor—are disproportionately cut out of the political processes of their communities, resulting in a negative cycle of poverty and illiteracy that affects all our children.

### ***What can I do?***

- **Educate.** Ensure that people in Michigan and elsewhere are aware of the rapidly falling literacy rate in Detroit and other cities in Michigan. Point out the link between literacy and voting rates, intergenerational poverty, and unemployment. Talk about the effect that Emergency Management has had on public school education and city infrastructure in Michigan.
- **Advocate.** Make sure people are aware of the dropping literacy rate and its link to mismanaged funding for public schools. Remind people that all children, no matter who they are, where they live, or what school they go to, have the right to learn how to read and write. Demand better from your municipality and your state government.
- **Volunteer.** If you have time, volunteer with literacy coalitions at libraries or local community centers. If you know a child who is struggling with reading and writing, offer to help them. Volunteer or donate to after school programs that provide literacy education to elementary schoolers.

### ***Voter Photo ID Laws***

In Michigan, **you need a photo ID to vote.** If you don’t have a photo ID, or arrive at a polling place without it, you can sign an affidavit attesting to your residence in the state of Michigan.<sup>xvii</sup> Then, you can cast your vote, and it will be counted on Election Day.<sup>xviii</sup>

However, a bill proposed in the Michigan State House in 2016 could have changed all of that. The bill, HB 6066, aimed to make it impossible for people in Michigan without photo ID from voting at all, unless they also delivered additional documents proving their identity and address to a government office within ten days after signing an affidavit and voting with a provisional ballot.<sup>xix</sup> Otherwise, **the vote would not be counted.**<sup>xx</sup>

Had this bill become law, voting in Michigan would have become entirely dependent on having a photo ID. This bill was meant to make “voter fraud” more difficult, but considering the statistics on voter fraud are basically nonexistent,<sup>xxi</sup> this bill would have just made it more difficult or nearly impossible for more than 18,000 registered voters in Michigan—especially poor people, people of color, and people with disabilities—to be able to have their vote counted.<sup>xxii</sup>

**We must be vigilant** of future bills like HB 6066 in the Michigan Legislature to ensure that all voters in Michigan are able to vote, regardless of whether they possess a photo ID.

### ***Why should we care?***

- If a voter photo ID law passes in the state of Michigan, many people—particularly LGBTQ people, poor people, people of color, and people with disabilities—will find it difficult or impossible to cast a ballot or have their vote counted.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- Voter ID laws are historically racist and classist and have been compared to the now illegal “poll tax” intended to disenfranchise Black people and people of color during the Jim Crow era.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- Transgender people, whose government IDs may not match their gender presentation, may be denied from voting at all if a bill like HB 6066 became law.<sup>xxv</sup>

### ***What can I do?***

- **Educate.** Make sure people know that “voter fraud” is a basically non-existent phenomenon usually used as a scare tactic to implement laws that ultimately prevent LGBTQ people, people of color, and poor people from voting. Tell people about the voter suppression tactics that are used to make it difficult or impossible for transgender people, people of color, and poor people when they try to vote.
- **Advocate.** Speak up for the rights of LGBTQ people, poor people, and people of color. Speak out against voter ID laws in your community and to your political representatives.
- **Volunteer.** Pay for someone’s photo ID. Volunteer with voter registration teams.

### ***Straight-Ticket Voting***

For many years, the people of Michigan have had the option of *straight-ticket voting*. Straight-ticket voting is a specific design for the voting ballot, where two bubbles are provided at the top of the ballot. One bubble is labeled *Democrat*, and the other *Republican*. By filling in this bubble, you are voting for the *entire slate* of a party's candidates—say, every Democrat on a ballot—by filling in one bubble. This greatly decreases the amount of time it takes to vote, and allows people who have little time, or lower literacy rates, to effectively participate in the electoral process.

The Michigan Legislature has tried to eliminate straight-ticket voting twice, and both times Michigan voters blocked their attempts by voting to repeal the laws through the ballot initiative process.

In 2015, the Republican-controlled Legislature in Michigan once again attempted to ban straight-ticket voting in the state. A temporary court order blocked the law from going into effect during the 2016

election.<sup>xxvi</sup> In late July 2018, a federal judge ruled that Michigan cannot ban straight-ticket voting because the law was racially discriminatory.<sup>xxvii</sup> The judge wrote several times throughout case that eliminating straight-ticket voting would diminish the voice of Black voters in Michigan—and experts agree. Banning straight-ticket voting is expected to increase wait times on Election Day, resulting in a disproportionate impact on Black voters and other people of color.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### ***Why should we care?***

- The elimination of straight-ticket voting will have a disproportionate impact on poor people and people of color.<sup>xxix</sup> It will cause longer voting lines, making it difficult for those who work two, three, or four jobs to stand around waiting to cast their ballot.
- Communities with lower literacy rates will also suffer, due to the potential that ballots will be filled out incorrectly,<sup>xxx</sup> making it invalid and not counted.
- All people need to stand up against racist voter ID laws and the elimination of straight-ticket voting, to ensure all voices are heard.

### ***What can I do?***

- **Educate** people about the importance of literacy and the need for straight-ticket voting for minority communities. Make sure those around you know that voter ID laws and the elimination of straight-ticket voting are racist and classist.
- **Advocate.** Vote against the elimination of straight-ticket voting. Join groups that are registering people to vote. Talk to your municipal council, your governor, your state representatives, and your congressmembers to ensure that they know the elimination of straight-ticket voting is racist and classist. Speak up.

## ***Gerrymandering***

Gerrymandering works like this: the majority party in the legislature redraws the lines of districts, in both state legislative and federal congressional maps, to either spread out the opposition party's support across too many districts for their voting power to have any kind of impact (cracking), *or* to draw district lines to cram the opposition party's voting power into one small, inconsequential district, thus destroying their ability to vote out the majority party (packing).

The League of Women Voters of Michigan, alongside a handful of Democratic voters, filed a lawsuit<sup>xxxi</sup> against Michigan's Secretary of State Ruth Johnson that claimed the 2011 district maps for the state of Michigan were *unconstitutional partisan gerrymanders*—that is, that the Michigan state legislative and federal congressional maps were intentionally drawn by a Republican-controlled legislature to minimize the impact of Democratic voters in each district in order to ensure a healthy Republican majority.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The first tactic is known as *cracking*: in the case of *League of Women Voters of Michigan v. Johnson*, the plaintiffs claim that the Republican legislative majority effectively cracked the Democratic voter bloc into pieces by redrawing district lines to spread out the Democratic population and surround them with Republican voters, to effectively destroy the power of the Democratic vote.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The second style of gerrymandering is known as *packing*: the plaintiffs in *League of Women Voters of Michigan v. Johnson* also allege that Republicans pushed Democratic party voters into a small, absurdly-shaped districts to minimize their potential voting power.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Secretary of State Johnson attempted to have the case put on hold until the U.S. Supreme Court resolved a similar case of gerrymandering which had occurred in Wisconsin (*Gill v. Whitford*),<sup>xxxv</sup> but the court decided to let the plaintiffs' case move forward.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The trial is currently scheduled for February 2019.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

If this case is decided and the court finds that gerrymandering occurred, it would force a complete redrawing all legislative and congressional district maps in the state of Michigan.

### ***Why should we care?***

- Racial and political gerrymandering have long had an impact on whether LGBTQ people, people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses can vote for a representative that actually represents their community.<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- By cracking and packing, the majority party in any state can ensure that theirs is the only voice heard.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- All people in all communities deserve to have a say in their political process, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, disability, economic status, or mental illness.

### ***What can I do?***

- **Educate.** Tell people about the racist history of gerrymandering and the inherent political unfairness of this redistricting process. Demystify gerrymandering as a political tool and expose it for the shameless power-grab it really is.
- **Advocate.** Speak up on behalf of those people who have had the power of their vote destroyed by packing and cracking. Keep gerrymandering in public discussion by contacting your local and state government.

## *Emergency Management in Detroit: Fact Sheet*

Flint, MI is not the only Michigan city, township, or school district to have been given an Emergency Manager in the last fifteen years. The city of Detroit had an Emergency Manager from 2013 to 2014.

### *Quick Facts*

- Detroit, Michigan has a population of roughly 673,000.<sup>xi</sup> 40% of people live in poverty.<sup>xli</sup>
- 79.7% of people living in Detroit are Black.<sup>xlii</sup>
- 71% of Michigan residents who have lived under Emergency Management have been Black.<sup>xliii</sup>

In the spring of 2013, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder appointed Kevyn Orr as the Emergency Manager of Detroit, MI.<sup>xliiv</sup> Prior to his appointment, Orr had been a high-profile bankruptcy lawyer from Maryland.<sup>xliv</sup> Soon after Orr's appointment, Detroit filed for bankruptcy; it is estimated that Detroit was between \$18 and \$20 billion in debt—the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history.<sup>xlvi</sup> A former mayor was convicted of racketeering and fraud that same year.<sup>xlvii</sup>

In 2014, Detroit was officially declared no longer bankrupt; Orr's decisions as Emergency Manager allowed the city of Detroit to shed about \$7 billion in debt and spend about \$1.7 billion to reorganize and remake its city services.<sup>xlviii</sup> Detroit was declared free of Emergency Management on December 10, 2014.<sup>xlix</sup>

While the city of Detroit was freed from Emergency Management in 2014, the Detroit public school system was still being overseen by an Emergency Manager due to its own financial crisis.<sup>i</sup> The District was under the Emergency Management of Darnell Earley—one of Flint's Emergency Managers—until February of 2016.<sup>ii</sup> The same year, a class action lawsuit was in progress against Governor Snyder and other Michigan state officials, claiming that public and charter school students have been deprived of literacy due to the systemic failures of the Detroit Public Schools Community District.<sup>lii</sup>

Between 2011 and 2016, under the leadership of Governor Snyder, seven cities or school districts declared financial emergencies.

As of June 27, 2018, the state of Michigan is without an Emergency Manager for a city or town for the first time in 18 years.<sup>liii</sup>

### ***Why do we care?***

Voting rights are an LGBTQ issue. Many (but still not all) LGBTQ people in the United States have the right to vote, and the appointment of Emergency Managers take that away from us. Overturning the democratic process in favor of a leader selected by the state and not allowing citizens to vote Emergency Managers out of office is not democratic. LGBTQ people, people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses are already disproportionately impacted by voter ID laws, gerrymandering, racism, and ableism. Having our right to vote entirely taken away is even more undemocratic.

### ***What can I do?***

- **Vote.** Register to vote and vote in every election you can, national, state, or local. By voting against further expansion of the powers of Emergency Managers, cities, towns, and school districts can take back the power of their communities and make sure all voices are



heard. Whether you are LGBTQ, a person of color, poor, a person with a disability, or a person with a mental illness, you have a right to vote.

- **Register others to vote.** Find those around you who are not registered to vote, or whose registration is not current, and help them register.
- **Educate.** Tell others about how Emergency Manager laws disrupt and destroy the democratic process. Participate in the electoral process, and make sure you and those around you know your rights. Talk about voter ID laws and the impact these have on LGBTQ communities, communities of color, and poor communities. Keep people aware.

## ***Flint and Emergency Management***

*“Flint's Emergency Managers have not been from the community, have not been elected by the community, have not been accountable to the community, and have not lived in the community.”*  
—Dr. Paul Mohai, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Emergency Management takes away a citizen’s right to vote and eliminates any kind of democratic process within the managed municipality, city, or town. It is undemocratic and, according to a current lawsuit, frequently used in communities of color and poor white communities to take power away from local government, like city councils and mayors. Statistically, it is more likely for communities of color to be put into Emergency Management in Michigan.<sup>liv</sup>

### ***What is Emergency Management?***

Emergency Managers are people—not always politicians or people with experience in the law—who have been granted incredibly broad powers by the state government to intervene in towns, cities, and school districts that are financially struggling.

In Michigan, Emergency Manager laws have received an enormous amount of backlash from citizens across the state. Emergency Managers are appointed by the state governor, not voted in, and often cannot be removed until at least a year has gone by.<sup>lv</sup> Starting in 2002, Flint was under the control of an Emergency Manager, on and off, for nearly nine years.<sup>lvi</sup> It resulted in a devastating water quality crisis that has disproportionately impacted LGBTQ people, people of color, poor people, and people with disabilities.

The powers of Emergency Managers were greatly expanded in 2010 by Republican Governor Rick Snyder.<sup>lvii</sup> Through a ballot initiative in November 2012, Michigan voters repealed that expansion—by only a 52-48 percent margin—but Snyder signed replacement legislation less than two months later. The law, Public Act 436 of 2012, included an appropriation, making it immune to the ballot referendum. In other words, this law can’t be overturned by a vote of the people.<sup>lviii</sup>

The law essentially created four pathways for struggling municipalities, one being an assignment an Emergency Manager.<sup>lix</sup> That Emergency Manager can only be removed after one year, through a two-thirds majority vote in the local governing body.<sup>lx</sup>

Currently, Detroit lawyer Herb Sanders is fighting against the Emergency Manager law in Michigan, claiming it is unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits certain race-based discrimination. Sanders claims that the law discriminate against non-white

communities by taking away their “governing power while not applying the law to similarly situated majority white municipalities . . . suffering equal or greater financial distress.”<sup>lxi</sup>

### *Quick Facts*

- Flint, MI has a population of almost 100,000 people, and the poverty rate is 41.9%.<sup>lxii</sup> 41,000 people are living at or below the poverty line.<sup>lxiii</sup>
- Out of 100,000 people in Flint, 54,000 (54%) are Black.<sup>lxiv</sup>
- 71% of Michigan residents who have lived under Emergency Management have been Black.<sup>lxv</sup>
- The poverty rate of Flint is more than double than that of the state of Michigan generally (41.9%, compared to 20%).<sup>lxvi</sup>
- Most LGBTQ people in Flint live below the poverty line.<sup>lxvii</sup>

### ***What did Emergency Management mean for Flint?***

- 2011: The state of Michigan takes over the management of Flint and its finances after an audit projected a multimillion-dollar deficit, and an eight-member financial review team determined that Flint was in a state of “financial emergency” due to oncoming bankruptcy.<sup>lxviii</sup>
- March 2012: Genesee County announces that a new pipeline is being designed to bring water from Lake Huron to the city of Flint.<sup>lxix</sup>
- April 2013: The Michigan State Treasurer decides, on recommendation of the Flint city council, to switch to Flint River water for the city’s water supply.<sup>lxx</sup>
- September 2013: Darnell Earley replaced Mike Brown as Flint’s Emergency Manager.<sup>lxxi</sup>
- April 2014: Under Earley’s oversight, Flint’s water source was switched to the Flint River, rather than the cleaner Lake Huron.<sup>lxxii</sup> The switch was intended to cut costs and was only intended to be a short-term move.
- August 2014: Fecal coliform bacteria is detected in the river water. The city issues a boil water warning and flushes the system with chlorine.<sup>lxxiii</sup> A month later, another boil water advisory is issued after a test for total coliform bacteria—which indicates that *E. coli* or other organisms may be present in the water—comes back positive.<sup>lxxiv</sup>
- January 2015: Gerald Ambrose was brought into Flint as Emergency Manager after Earley was transferred to oversee the Detroit Public Schools Community District. Ambrose then declined an offer from the Detroit Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) to reconnect the city to Detroit water, even though DWSD offered to waive the typical \$4 million fee.<sup>lxxv</sup> Because Ambrose was the Emergency Manager, the city council could not override his decision. The same month, Flint residents bring jugs of contaminated water to a community forum.<sup>lxxvi</sup>
- Ambrose also signed orders to prevent any officials in Flint from changing or revising any of his actions for at least a year after he left.<sup>lxxvii</sup> In the meantime, there were reports of children developing rashes and “mysterious” illnesses.<sup>lxxviii</sup>
- March 2015: Ambrose ignored the vote of the city council to move the water source back to Detroit, citing the expense, calling the move “incomprehensible,” and saying that Detroit water was no better.<sup>lxxix</sup> Additionally, Flint’s finances were switched over into the control of the Receivership Transition Advisory Board (RTAB), which made it necessary to get RTAB’s approval before any decisions made by the mayor and city council could go into effect.<sup>lxxx</sup>

- June 2015: A scientist from Virginia Tech tests water from the home of Lee-Anne Walters and finds that the lead levels in her water were as high as 13,200 parts per billion (ppb).<sup>lxxxix</sup> The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) mandates that water with more than 15 ppb of lead is undrinkable. Water contaminated with 5,000 ppb of lead has been labeled as hazardous waste.<sup>lxxxix</sup>
- Three states of emergency were declared by 2016.<sup>lxxxix</sup> It is estimated that it will cost \$1.5 billion for the water pipes to be replaced.<sup>lxxxix</sup>
- Most decisions made by the city were approved by the RTAB, but one of them—a June 2017 moratorium on water bills to prevent Flint residents from losing their homes because of unpaid water bills—was overturned.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Poor communities in Flint have already been evicted, with 8,000 homes placed on notice in 2017 for unpaid water bills for water that is toxic.<sup>lxxxix</sup>
- As of January 10, 2018, RTAB no longer needs to approve any actions made by the Flint mayor or city council, but it will still have a say in approving Flint's budget.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

### **Why should we care?**

*"...a different strategy and a different law should be put into place to help distressed cities. Not to poison democracies, poison water, poison communities."* —Marcus Muhammad, Mayor of Benton Harbor, MI

Having the right to vote taken away is an issue that affects all of us. The people of Flint, Michigan—LGBTQ, people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses—have been consistently denied the opportunity to have a voice in decisions made about their community. Their protests and complaints about their children's illnesses, the quality of their water, and their sicknesses were outright dismissed and ignored. They were *actively prevented from voting by the implementation of an Emergency Manager*, a position that operates outside of the democratic system and has no accountability to voters. The officials elected by the city of Flint were prevented from doing their jobs because of the presence of an Emergency Manager with sweeping powers who could actively prevent them from overturning policies the Emergency Manager put into place.<sup>lxxxix</sup> In 2016, the cultural impact of the water crisis was credited for a voter turnout that broke records in the city of Flint—primary election ballots actually ran out across the city.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

### **What can I do?**

- **Vote.** *Voting is power.* The governor of Michigan actively overturned the voice of the people in expanding the powers of Emergency Managers, and it resulted in disaster. Voting ensures that *all* people—LGBTQ, people of color, poor, disabled, mentally ill—have a voice. Register to vote and vote in every election you can: national, state, or local.
- **Register others to vote.** Spread the word about how to register, how to vote, and what is and is not allowed in the state of Michigan. Sign people up in your neighborhood to be voters.
- **Educate.** Tell others about how Emergency Manager laws disrupt and destroy the democratic process. Participate in the electoral process, and make sure you and those around you know your rights.

## ***Flint and Environmental Disasters***

Historically, environmental disasters like the ones in Flint, MI are the result of the targeting of poor communities by corporations, factories, and big-name companies as locations for factories and other production centers that have a negative environmental impact on the surrounding area.<sup>xc</sup> As LGBTQ people, people of color, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses are more likely to live in poverty,<sup>xcii</sup> the targeting of poor communities by corporations and the ensuing environmental disasters disproportionately impacts these folks.

### ***What is environmental justice?***

The Asian Pacific Environmental Network defines environmental justice as “the right to a decent, safe quality of life for people of all races, incomes and cultures in the environments where we live, work, play, learn and pray.”<sup>xcii</sup> The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines it as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.”<sup>xciii</sup>

*When one or more groups of people is worse-off than others because of policies, regulations, accessibility, or racism, that is injustice.*

*Environmental racism* is what occurs when people of color suffer disproportionate risks, harms, and effects from environmental and public health policies that are *supposed to* benefit all people.<sup>xciv</sup>

No person or group of people should feel the impact of negative environmental consequences more than others, especially when those consequences are the result of industrial, governmental, or commercial operations and policies.

### ***What about Flint?***

Almost immediately after Flint’s water source was switched to the Flint River, Flint citizens began to protest the quality of their water, which had become visibly discolored and smelled and tasted terrible.<sup>xcv</sup> The city flushed the system multiple times, multiple boil water advisories were issued, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issued a paper that indicated that the cause of contamination was probably related to aging iron pipes with bacteria buildup.<sup>xcvi</sup>

The switch from Lake Huron to the Flint River as the city’s water source resulted in skyrocketing lead levels, fecal bacteria, and outbreaks of Legionnaire’s disease in Genesee County.<sup>xcvii</sup> By September 2015, a team of scientists from Virginia Tech University issued a report indicating that 40% of Flint homes had elevated lead levels in their water, and that Flint water was 19 times more corrosive than the water in Detroit, corroding the old pipes and leaching lead into the water.<sup>xcviii</sup> Fetal deaths rose by 58% during the crisis; fertility rates dropped by 12%.<sup>xcix</sup> Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha of the Hurley Medical Center released a study indicating that the number of children with elevated lead levels in their blood almost doubled after the water source switch.<sup>c</sup>

The roughly 1,000 undocumented people in Flint were often barred from collecting bottled water due to the perceived need for a government ID.<sup>ci</sup> The deeply-held association of local police stations with the federal government—and, particularly, with ICE—meant that many undocumented people or immigrant families would not open the door for police delivering water filters to residents with contaminated pipes.<sup>cii</sup> Residents of Flint with outstanding warrants or who had had previous experience with the police

would also not answer the door.<sup>ciii</sup> There were also reports of undocumented residents of Flint and people with outstanding police warrants being targeted at water distribution centers to be arrested or detained.<sup>civ</sup> Only 30% of Flint's residents would answer the door for crisis workers.<sup>cv</sup> Because of this, many people were never shown how to install water filters.

On April 6, 2018, Governor Snyder announced the end of the free bottled water program in Flint, MI. Flint still has higher lead levels in their municipal water than the rest of the state of Michigan,<sup>cvi</sup> but Flint residents must wait until the year 2020 for the dangerous, lead-laced pipes to be replaced and still must pay their water bills.<sup>cvi</sup> Meanwhile, the state approved a permit to allow Nestle, the beverage company, to pump 500,000 gallons of fresh water a day from a source 100 miles away for only \$200 a year.<sup>cvi</sup> However, it is currently Nestle, and not the state government, that is providing free bottled water to the people of Flint.<sup>cix</sup>

### ***Why do I care?***

Most LGBTQ people in Flint live below the poverty line.<sup>cx</sup> 41.9% of people in Flint, MI are poor, and 54% of them are Black or people of color.<sup>cx</sup> LGBTQ people, especially transgender people and people living with HIV (PLHIV), were deeply affected by the devastation inflicted on Flint by the water crisis.<sup>cxi</sup>

*When communities cannot afford legal representation, their rights are violated.* Poor communities of all sexualities, gender identities, colors, and abilities are frequently targeted by corporations that expect no real fight from the poor and disenfranchised who cannot afford to take a company to court over projected fiscal and environmental issues.<sup>cxi</sup> Because of institutional racism and zoning laws, frequently these communities—like Flint—have a poor Black majority.<sup>cxi</sup>

### ***What can I do?***

- **Educate.** Teach others about environmental justice and the impact of environmental racism on poor communities and communities of color.
- **Volunteer.** If you can, participate in protests and volunteer actions against environmental racism. Donate water bottles to independent distribution centers in Flint, MI.
- **Advocate.** Advocate for the rights of poor people against corporations and environmentally devastating politics. **Sign petitions** to make politicians and communities aware of potential dangers of environmental destruction. Speak to those around you about the impact that environmentally racist policies had on the city of Flint and speak up against environmental racism.

## ***LGBTQ Issues in Flint, Michigan***

*“When you have one voice [in power], you essentially don't have checks and balances in a democracy.”* —Eric Scorsone, Director for the Center for Local Government Finance and Policy, Michigan State University

### ***Quick Facts***

- Michigan has an LGBTQ population of roughly 294,015 people, or about 3.8% of the state's population.<sup>cxv</sup>
- 31% of the LGBTQ population is currently raising children.

- Michigan actively criminalizes being exposed to and/or transmitting HIV.<sup>cxvi</sup>
- Most LGBTQ people in Flint live below the poverty line.<sup>cxvii</sup>
- In 2010, Genesee County ranked eighth in the state of Michigan for HIV and AIDS rates.<sup>cxviii</sup> The only HIV/AIDS center in Genesee County, Wellness AIDS Services, was one of those properties with undrinkable water due to rising lead levels.<sup>cxix</sup>
- The first LGBTQ organization in Flint was established in 1975.<sup>cxx</sup> The first non-discrimination ordinance protecting LGBTQ people in Flint was passed in 1991.<sup>cxxi</sup> The ordinance was expanded to protect LGBTQ people and people living with HIV against discrimination in housing and accommodations in 2012.<sup>cxxii</sup> The first Pride festival in Flint was in 2010.<sup>cxxiii</sup>

For LGBTQ people in Flint, the water crisis was just as dangerous and just as terrifying as it was to anybody else. For people who live at or below the poverty line, who may not have a car, or who had to take the bus to water distribution centers, the amount of bottled water they could carry back is restricted to what they could physically lift.

For transgender people, particularly transgender people of color, going to a fire station or a church to get bottled drinking water might not have even been an option. The Centers set up around firehouses to hand out drinking water required ID checks.<sup>cxxiv</sup> While the government did not *require* ID checks, most places would request ID before handing over water.<sup>cxxv</sup> For transgender people whose gender identities do not necessarily match their driver's licenses or government IDs, this was a barrier to getting drinkable water.

For people living with HIV, especially those with compromised immune systems, the lead contamination was particularly dangerous.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

### ***Why do I care?***

The quality of our water affects *everyone*. Black, brown, white, straight, queer, rich, poor—if water is undrinkable, everyone suffers.

### ***What can I do?***

- **Advocate.** Stand up for the rights of LGBTQ people and PLHIV. Dispel the myths about PLHIV. Push local and state governments to enact anti-discrimination laws for transgender people who were denied water at fire stations due to their gender presentation not matching their state-issued ID.
- **Educate.** Talk about the poverty rates of LGBTQ people and the impact that poverty has on transgender people, people of color, families, the elderly, people with disabilities, and people with mental illnesses. Connect the dots between poverty, environmental disaster, water access, and illness, especially for those living in Flint. Teach others about discrimination against transgender and gender nonconforming people, especially in emergency situations.

## Queering the Poor People's Campaign

### What is the Poor People's Campaign?

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is a campaign that is forcing an examination of poverty, racism, and environmental devastation in the United States today. In 1968, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., alongside Myles Horton (the Highlander Center), Loretta Two Crow (National Welfare Rights), Cesar Chavez (United Farm Workers), Al McSurely (Appalachian Volunteers), Phillip Bernstein (Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare), Tillie Walker (United Indian Scholarship Fund), and future Congressman John Lewis (Southern Regional Council) founded the original Poor People's Campaign to unite the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized across the United States. Today, Rev. Barber and Rev. Theoharis continue the fight for the marginalized by leading a second Campaign.

### Why does it matter?

In 2018, there are fewer voting rights than there were in 1968.<sup>cxxvii</sup> 23 states have passed racist voter suppression laws that disproportionately affect Black people.<sup>cxxviii</sup> 17 states have implemented voter suppression laws that target Native American and Alaska Native voters.<sup>cxxix</sup> 6.1 million people are unable to vote due to felony convictions, including one in 13 Black adults.<sup>cxxx</sup> 32 million people in the United States do not have health insurance.<sup>cxxxi</sup>

Forty percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ.<sup>cxxxii</sup> 24% of lesbians and bisexual women are below the poverty line.<sup>cxxxiii</sup> Black and African-American same-sex couples are three times more likely to live in poverty than white same-sex couples.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> Transgender people, especially transgender women of color, are four times as likely as cisgender people to have a household income under \$10,000 and twice as likely as cisgender people to be unemployed, and 90% of transgender individuals have experienced harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination at work.<sup>cxxxv</sup> One in five transgender people have been homeless at some point in their lives.<sup>cxxxvi</sup>

### Why is the Task Force involved?

Queer people span across all demographics—rich, poor, Black, white, abled, disabled—and are heavily impacted by injustice. By joining with the Poor People's Campaign, we stand alongside all those affected by poverty, inequality, and environmental destruction in the United States, and we demand justice for those who have had none for decades.

## Resources

### Voting

[Michigan Voting Information Center](#)

[Register to Vote](#)

[View Sample Ballot](#)

[Find Your Polling Place](#)

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