

# City of Detroit

## CITY COUNCIL

### DENZEL ANTON MCCAMPBELL COUNCIL MEMBER, DISTRICT 7

#### MEMORANDUM

TO: Janice M. Winfrey, Clerk

THRU: Council President James Tate

FROM: Council Member Denzel Anton McCampbell *D.A. McCampbell*

DATE: March 31, 2026

RE: FY27 Budget Hearing Follow Up – Office of the City Clerk and Department of Elections

Thank you again for your time and for the presentation during the recent hearing. We appreciate the Clerk’s willingness to walk through current operations and respond to council questions. As a follow-up, I have a few additional questions so I can better understand some of the issues discussed on the record and areas that may come up in future policy discussions.

#### Office of the City Clerk

- 1) The only performance metric listed is “Average response time associated with internal and external public information records requests: 24–48 business hours.” What is the current actual average response time? How does this compare to the 24–48 hour target, and is data being collected on whether requesters are disproportionately waiting longer based on the type of request or the neighborhood the request originates from?
- 2) What percentage of public information requests come from Detroit residents versus outside entities such as media, law firms, or commercial data aggregators? Does the office track the demographic profile of requesters to ensure the office is serving the public equitably?
- 3) The Clerk’s office provides “Public Affairs Information” as its sole operating program. Has the office considered expanding its programming to include community-facing services like proactive outreach on how to access public records, especially targeting low-income residents, seniors, residents with disabilities, and non-English-speaking Detroiters who may not know how to navigate the records request process?
- 4) How does the City Clerk’s office ensure that its public records and documents are accessible to residents with limited English proficiency or with disabilities, including those who are visually impaired, deaf, or have limited digital literacy? Are documents available in alternative formats, including in other languages and braille?

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- 5) The office has 14 positions in the Office of the City Clerk cost center and 10 in City Council Support Staff. Is the workload distribution between these two units equitable? Are City Council Support Staff compensated comparably to their counterparts in the Office of the City Clerk?
- 6) With the budget decreasing by over \$797,000, is the City Clerk's office being asked to do the same work with significantly fewer resources? How does the administration ensure that budget austerity in this office does not result in degraded service to the residents of Detroit?
- 7) Is the fee structure for City Clerk services equitable? Are fees waived or reduced for low-income residents, community organizations, or individuals requesting records for purposes related to civil rights, housing, or other matters of public concern?

### Department of Elections

- 1) The Department's own metrics report that only 35.6% of registered voters cast ballots in General, Midterms, and City elections between 2016 and 2025. And in 2025, only 10,683 new voter registrations were completed in all of calendar year. In a city of approximately 620,000 people, these numbers are strikingly low. What is the Department's assessment of why voter participation in Detroit remains so depressed, and what structural, systemic, or resource-related factors do the Department believe are contributing to this? How is the Department addressing this?
- 2) Goal #3 mentions "aggressive voter outreach," but the Pre-Election Voter Education & Outreach budget line is only \$710,932 with zero FTEs assigned to it. Who is performing this outreach work? Do you feel that amount is enough for an aggressive program?
- 3) What is the Department's specific, measurable target for voter registration and turnout in the November 2026 elections? If there is no target, why not? How can the Council evaluate the effectiveness of voter outreach spending without benchmarks?
- 4) What is the current total number of registered voters in Detroit, and how does this compare to the estimated voting-eligible population? How does Detroit's registration rate compare to other large majority-Black cities such as Atlanta, Memphis, Baltimore, and New Orleans?
- 5) How is the Department adapting its outreach to reach newer residents, renters who move frequently, formerly incarcerated individuals whose voting rights have been restored, unhoused residents, college students/campuses, and young people between 17 1/2 years old and 18?
- 6) What specific voter education programming is the Department conducting in Detroit public schools, community colleges, and Wayne State University to engage young voters ages 18–25?
- 7) Are all Detroit polling locations ADA-compliant? If not, what is being done to do so and ensure all polling locations are accessible for all voters?
- 8) What language access does the Department provide at polling places and in voter education materials? Are materials and ballot assistance available in Arabic, Spanish, French, Bangla, and other languages spoken by significant numbers of Detroit residents?

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- 9) How does the Department address the role of voter suppression, including misinformation on social media, robocalls, mailers with incorrect polling information, and intimidation at the polls, in depressing turnout in Detroit’s Black communities? Is there a counter-misinformation strategy, and is it funded?
- 10) In February 2026, President Trump specifically named Detroit as a city with what he falsely called “horrible corruption on elections,” and stated that “the federal government should get involved” and that “somebody else should take over” if cities cannot count votes “legally and honestly.” He further stated that Republicans should “nationalize the voting” in at least 15 places. Trump’s ally Steve Bannon publicly called for ICE agents to “surround the polls come November.” Michigan Republican state legislators have formally requested that the U.S. Department of Justice deploy monitors to Detroit. What steps has the Department of Elections taken, in coordination with the City Clerk, the Law Department, and the Mayor’s office, to prepare for potential federal interference in Detroit’s elections? Is there a legal strategy in place, and does the FY 2027 budget include any funding for legal defense of the City’s election sovereignty?
- What coordination, if any, is the Department of Elections conducting with the Michigan Secretary of State’s office, the Michigan Attorney General’s office, Wayne County, and other local election jurisdictions to prepare a unified response to federal interference attempts? Is the City participating in any multi-jurisdictional legal defense or planning efforts?
  - Has the Department assessed the potential psychological and behavioral impact on Detroit voters of having armed federal agents near or at polling places? What proactive steps is the Department taking to reassure voters and counter fear-based suppression?
- 11) The SAVE America Act, which passed the U.S. House in February 2026 and is currently being debated in the Senate, would require all Americans to present documentary proof of citizenship—such as a passport or certified birth certificate—when registering to vote. Analysis from the Bipartisan Policy Center found that approximately 12% of registered voters nationwide lack both a passport and a birth certificate with a matching government-issued photo ID. Given that Detroit residents are disproportionately low-income, less likely to have passports, and more likely to have experienced document loss due to housing instability, fires, or displacement, has the Department assessed how many current or prospective Detroit voters could be disenfranchised if this law passes? If not, why not?
- It would effectively eliminate online voter registration and mail-in voter registration by requiring in-person presentation of citizenship documents at an election office. Michigan currently allows online registration and has robust mail-in registration processes. How would this affect the Department’s registration operations? What would the cost be in terms of additional staffing, facility capacity, and wait times at Detroit’s election offices?
  - It disproportionately burdens women who have changed their names through marriage or divorce (approximately 84% of married women) because their birth certificates would not match their current legal names, requiring additional

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documentation. It also disproportionately burdens transgender individuals, naturalized citizens, elderly voters, people experiencing housing instability, and low-income people who cannot afford the cost of obtaining replacement documents. Has the Department analyzed the specific demographic groups in Detroit most at risk of disenfranchisement under this law?

- c. If the SAVE America Act passes and takes effect immediately it would apply to the November 2026 elections. Does the Department have a contingency plan for implementing such a law on short notice? Has any funding been set aside in the FY 2027 budget for emergency implementation of new federal voter registration requirements?
- 12) The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on March 23, 2026, in *Watson v. Republican National Committee*, a challenge to Mississippi's law allowing mail-in ballots postmarked by Election Day to be counted if received within five business days. The Court's conservative majority appeared ready to rule that federal law requires all ballots to be received by Election Day. While Michigan already requires absentee ballots to be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day, meaning the ruling would not directly change Michigan law, what is the Department doing to ensure Detroit voters understand that Michigan's absentee ballot rules are not affected by this case?
    - a. Michigan law does allow military and overseas ballots to be counted if postmarked by Election Day and received within 6 days after. If the Supreme Court ruling applies to military and overseas ballots as well, this could directly affect Detroit residents serving abroad. Has the Department assessed how many Detroit voters rely on military/overseas ballot provisions, and does it have a plan to ensure those voters are informed of any changes?
  - 13) If the Supreme Court decision, the SAVE America Act, or executive orders from the Trump administration create conflicting federal and state requirements for elections in Detroit, how will the Department navigate those conflicts? Has the Law Department provided guidance on which authority prevails, and does the Department have legal counsel budgeted specifically for election law challenges in FY 2027?
  - 14) It is our understanding that the Department is planning to operate at least one Election Day vote center for the November 2026 election, where residents could register and vote in a single visit. Can the Department confirm this, and if so, how many vote centers are planned, where will they be located, and what criteria are being used to select sites?
  - 15) On Election Day, election inspectors who encounter issues at their polling places must call in to the Department for guidance. In recent election cycles, inspectors have reported hold times approaching an hour, which directly delays voting at the affected polling location. How many staff are assigned to the Election Day call-in line, and what is the Department's target response time? What steps are being taken in the FY 2027 budget to ensure adequate staffing so that no polling place is effectively stalled while an inspector waits on hold?
  - 16) In 2024, the Department piloted a curbside voting model in which signage was posted outside polling locations with a phone number for voters to call, and a dedicated election inspector with a dedicated phone line was assigned to respond. What were the results and

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- lessons learned from that pilot? Does the Department intend to continue and expand this model in 2026, and is there dedicated funding in the FY 2027 budget to support it?
- 17) Michigan election law has changed significantly in recent years, and Detroit's elections will be under extraordinary public and federal scrutiny in November 2026. How many hours of training does each election inspector receive, and how has the training curriculum been updated to reflect recent legal changes? What is the Department's plan to ensure that every poll worker is fully prepared, and is the training budget in FY 2027 sufficient to meet that standard?

Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions. Thank you.

Cc: Honorable Detroit City Council  
Louise Jones, City Clerk's Office  
Malik Washington, Director of City Government Affairs