

Clerk's office mails out absentee ballot inquiries

DETROIT

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Detroit elections officials have found a way to revive, sort of, their former practice of automatically mailing applications for absentee ballots to seniors and previous absentee ballot voters.

In the last month, every household in the city with a registered voter was sent an application by the Detroit Clerk's Office to be put on a permanent list of voters who would automatically receive an absentee ballot application each election. State elections officials say this method com-

plies with an October ruling from the Michigan Court of Appeals that held clerks can send absentee ballot applications only to those voters who request them.

"If they send that back," Detroit Elections Director Daniel Baxter said of the application, "that is their request."

Other clerks say they have continued to mail absentee ballot applications to seniors, despite that court ruling.

Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh, who said in November that the court ruling would create more work for clerks, said Tuesday

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that she has continued her policy of mailing absentee ballot applications.

A separate lawsuit against Sabaugh on the same issue is pending before the Court of Appeals, and Sabaugh said until it rules, she is abiding by a local court ruling in favor of the practice, not the court's ruling regarding Detroit.

Oakland County Clerk Ruth Johnson said she was unsure if any local clerks in her county had taken the same approach as Detroit. Some communities,

like Troy, decided to defy the Court of Appeals' ruling and continue mailing out absentee ballot applications.

"It's a patchwork quilt right now," Johnson said of how each community is approaching the situation.

Saginaw County Clerk Susan Kaltenbach, president of the Michigan Association of County Clerks, said some municipal clerks have begun efforts like the one in Detroit, to create a new list of voters who have asked to be sent an absentee ballot with each election.

Although the state Bureau of

Elections authorized Detroit's effort, the court's ruling didn't speak to the issue.

One potential concern about permanent lists is what happens when a voter dies or moves, and how the community would prevent an absentee ballot application from being mailed to the former residence.

Baxter said Detroit elections officials have been working to purge their voter rolls of dead voters and former residents.

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