



City & Borough of Sitka

## Municipal Clerk's Office

100 Lincoln Street, Sitka AK 99835



# Memorandum

To: Mayor and Assembly  
Cc: Thru Mark Gorman, Municipal Administrator  
From: Colleen Ingman, Municipal Clerk  
Date: April 8, 2015  
Subject: Voting by Mail Temporary Ordinance 2015-22

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There are several reasons that I'm bringing the idea forward now and some additional reasons can be found in the attached documentation.

- Harrigan Centennial Hall will be closed while undergoing major renovation from August 1, 2015 through December, 2016. Sitka's two voting precincts are located in that building.
- SGC 2.40.220 instructs the municipal clerk to "deliver a ballot...or by mail..." and sets forth rules for mailing ballots. SGC 2.40.230 allows early voting, "as soon as ballots are available..."
- For several years, the State of Alaska and the City and Borough of Sitka have allowed voting-by-mail without requiring voters to sign an affidavit that they will be absent on election day. This so-called "no-excuses absentee voting" has proven to be popular and effective across the United States.
- In 1998 the State of Oregon instituted all-mail-ballot elections where every voter is automatically mailed a ballot. Washington State implemented a similar method in 2011, followed by Colorado in 2013. All states increased voter participation and, in fact, outperformed the US voter turnout rate. This process also makes voting more convenient for voters and allows voters a longer opportunity to study the ballot before completing their ballots.
- Voting by mail increases voter turnout.
- I could find no conflict in local or state law that would prohibit municipal elections in 2015 and 2016 to be conducted using an all-mail-ballot system. "Special-needs (ADA)" and "absentee" voting would remain available at the municipal clerk's office for those voters.

If we were to move in this direction even temporarily, and the ordinance was passed a campaign would follow to educate the public.

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

ORDINANCE NO. 2015-22

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA, ALASKA  
INSTITUTING ALL-MAIL-BALLOT FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN 2015 AND 2016  
WHILE SITKA'S POLLING PLACE OF HARRIGAN CENTENNIAL HALL  
UNDERGOES RENOVATION AND IS INACCESSIBLE FOR VOTING

1. **CLASSIFICATION.** This ordinance is NOT of a permanent nature and is not intended to become a part of the Sitka General Code (SGC).

2. **SEVERABILITY.** If any provision of this ordinance or any application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of this ordinance and application to any person or circumstances shall not be affected.

3. **PURPOSE.** Harrigan Centennial Hall will be closed while undergoing major renovation from August 1, 2015 through December, 2016. Sitka's two voting precincts are located in that building. SGC 2.40.220 instructs the municipal clerk to "deliver a ballot to the elector either personally, by a duly authorized representative, or by mail..." and sets forth rules for mailing ballots. SGC 2.40.230 allows early voting, "as soon as ballots are available from the election official up to and including election day, in a location and at places and times determined by the municipal clerk." Further, SGC 2.40.240 states that the "municipal clerk is authorized to fashion rules and procedures for the conduct of the election so long as they are not in conflict with this chapter." The municipal clerk finds no conflict exists and proposes that the elections in 2015 and 2016 be conducted using an all-mail-ballot system. Special-needs voting and machinery will be available at the municipal clerk's office.

For several years, the State of Alaska and the City and Borough of Sitka have allowed voting-by-mail without requiring voters to sign an affidavit that they will be absent on election day. This so-called "no-excuses absentee voting" has proven to be popular and effective across the United States. In 1998, the State of Oregon instituted all-mail-ballot elections where every voter is automatically mailed a ballot. Washington State implemented a similar method in 2011, followed by Colorado in 2013. All states increased voter participation and, in fact, outperformed the US voter turnout rate. This process also makes voting more convenient for voters and allows voters a longer opportunity to study the ballot before completing their ballots.

4. **ENACTMENT.** NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ENACTED by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka that all municipal elections held in 2015 and 2016 will be conducted using all-mail balloting. The municipal clerk will fashion necessary rules and procedures for all-mail-ballot elections.



Three states -- Oregon, Washington and Colorado -- conduct all elections by mail. A ballot is automatically mailed to every registered voter in advance of Election Day, and traditional in-person voting precincts are not available.

Advocates for mail balloting argue that because of its strong democratic tradition, the United States should continue to eradicate barriers to the franchise, and make voting easier through mail-in elections.

### **Advantages of Voting-by-Mail**

Mail balloting has several advantages over traditional polling. First, it is **cost effective**. Second, it has resulted in **increased participation among voters**. Third, it is **easier** for election officials to **conduct**. Fourth, it allows for a **more accurate picture of eligible voters**, by keeping **voting lists up-to-date**. Fifth, it gives voters a **longer opportunity to study the ballot and find answers to their questions**.

Every statistic shows that voting by mail is **more convenient** for voters and that it **increases turnout**.

Conducting elections by mail is much easier on the election administrators. Particularly in local elections, primaries, and local ballot questions, mail-in elections make sense as a place to start and to experiment. Mail balloting in such local elections has also resulted in increased turnout.

The Federal Election Commission book "Innovations in Election Administration 11: All-Mail-Ballot Elections" discusses the advantages of mail balloting for election administrators well:

No pollworkers includes: no recruitment; no notices to be sent; no classes to conduct; no distribution and retrieval of election day supplies; no last-minute cancellations from workers who had agreed to serve; no paychecks to cut and mail; no W-2's to send; no pre-dawn election-day hours to line up replacement workers. No polling places includes no polling place leases, telephones, utilities; no searching for or preparation of accessible locations; no frantic phone calls about locked doors; no preparation, set-up, tear-down, or emergency repairs of voting machines or devices; no confusion about where people must go to vote.

In addition, with more people voting absentee, using mail balloting exclusively avoids election administrators from essentially conducting two elections – an absentee election and a polling place election. There is more room for corruption when election administration officials have to basically conduct two parallel systems.

Voter lists are much easier to accurately maintain with mail balloting. This is because ballots that are returned to election officials as undeliverable highlight registrations that must be checked. This helps election officials purge their registration rolls of ineligible voters.

A more informed voting public is cited as another advantage of mail-in balloting. If an individual has two weeks between when he or she receives a ballot and when it must be returned, this

allows a better opportunity for voters to study the issues, to clarify any points of confusion, and get questions answered.

### **The Oregon Model: A Success in Mail Balloting**





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## Vote-By-Mail Made Easy

### Vote by Mail

All elections in Oregon are Vote by Mail. This means that registered voters receive their ballots in the mail and can vote in the comfort of their home. (en Español)

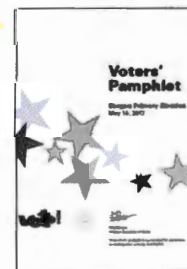
### Voters' Pamphlets

A state Voters' Pamphlet is mailed to **every household** in Oregon about 3 weeks before each statewide election. It includes information about each measure and candidate in the upcoming election. If you do not receive a Voters' Pamphlet, you can order or pick one up from:

- [Any County Elections Office](#)
- [The Secretary of State's Office](#)
- [Your local Post Office](#)

Some counties may print a voters' pamphlet with local measures and candidates. These may be included with the state pamphlet or mailed separately.

For each statewide election, the Voters' Pamphlet is also available in an accessible online format at [sos.oregon.gov/voting/Pages/default.aspx](http://sos.oregon.gov/voting/Pages/default.aspx).



An audio Voters' Guide is also available for each statewide election. Call 1 866 ORE VOTES for more information.

### Ballots

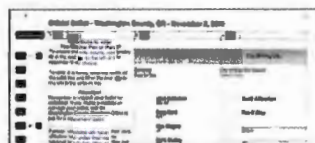
Ballots are mailed to every registered voter 18 to 20 days before the election.

If you move or change your mailing address you need to update your voter registration information to get a ballot.

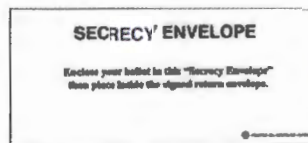
### The post office will not forward your ballot!

You have until 8pm on the day of the election to make any updates. If you do not receive your ballot at least 2 weeks before the election, call the Elections Office for help.

When your ballot package comes in the mail, it will include:



An official ballot



An optional secrecy envelope



A ballot return envelope

Your ballot return envelope has an area for you to sign. **You must sign it in order for your ballot to be counted.**

The secrecy envelope is optional and not required. The election Staff will ensure the secrecy of your ballot.

An Elections Official will compare the signature on your ballot return envelope to the signature on your voter registration card to verify your identity.

Signing another person's name is illegal. You must sign your own ballot return envelope.

For more information on the ballot see:

- [How to mark your Ballot](#)
- [Returning Your Ballot](#)

If you have a disability and cannot physically sign your name on the ballot return envelope, you may submit a signature stamp attestation to the County Elections Official.

### Other Inserts

You may also receive voting instructions, locations of ballot dropsites, or other useful information from the Elections Office.

Call 1-866-ORE VOTES or the County Elections Office for more information.

### Educational Video

To further understand how the system works, you may view this short video that demonstrates the various procedures and safe-guards that ensure the integrity of the entire vote-by-mail process. The video "unwraps" the story of the mail-in ballot and takes viewers behind the scenes, highlighting the efforts of both staff and volunteers alike, who make certain that votes are tallied accurately and that strict handling procedures are followed at all times.

**Oregon is one of two states that employ a vote-by-mail only system. Voters receive an information pamphlet three weeks before the election, followed a few days later by their ballots. With an average voter turnout of 60.13 – 8.5 percentage points above the national average – the system is working for Oregonians.**

**“There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that we see high turnout because of vote-by-mail,” says Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown. “It’s extremely convenient and accessible; it’s secure and cost-effective.”**

**Oregonians passed a referendum in 1998 to institute the vote-by-mail system – with almost 70 percent approval.**

**Secretary Brown rejects the criticism that mail-in ballots diminish the sense of civic engagement people may feel standing in line with their fellow citizens on Election Day. She says Oregonians have block parties and talk to their neighbors; issues are discussed in churches and synagogues.**

**“Civic engagement is much more meaningful and expansive when you have a ballot in hand for 2-1/2 weeks,” Brown says. “Election Day is not just one day – it’s several.”**

Another criticism of mail-in ballots is that there is more opportunity for voter fraud. Since 2000, 15 million ballots have been cast by mail in Oregon, but there have been only nine convictions of voter fraud, Brown says. The state takes extensive measures to ensure that ballots are secure: each envelope has a unique barcode, election officials verify every signature, and there are cameras in every election office to monitor the counting. People can also check online to make sure their ballot was counted.

Voter outreach is another factor at play in Oregon, says Michael Slater, executive director of the nonprofit Project Vote and a [Portland](#) resident. Campaigns can check to see if people have voted, and encourage them to cast their ballot.

“People knock on my door and ask if I need my ballot delivered,” Mr. Slater says. “It’s a very helpful way to keep people engaged.”

## ALASKA

Convenience is another factor at play in Alaska – as the state offers early (in-person or by mail) and absentee voting. Also, any registered voter can apply to have a ballot faxed to them. The “electronic transmission ballot” is due by 5 p.m. on [Election Day](#), according to Alaska’s Division of Elections.



## Mail Voting

Convenience voting, defined as access to voting at a time and place of the voter's choosing, has grown exponentially in the United States within the last two decades. A majority of states now permit "no-fault" or "no excuse" absentee voting, early in person voting, and vote-by-mail (VBM), and it is estimated that approximately one-third of all voters in the 2008 general election took advantage of some form of early voting.

There are advantages and disadvantages of convenience voting in the form of no excuse absentee voting, permanent no excuse absentee voting, and VBM, all of which use the United States Postal Service as a central component. As inevitably occurs with any significant change in a fundamental institution, the rapid expansion of voting outside the precinct polling place has been controversial. Proponents maintain that no excuse absentee and VBM systems increase turnout and may even expand political participation in previously under-represented demographic groups. Other supporters point out that convenience voting permits voters to study the ballot and issues more closely and make more informed choices. Opponents decry the greater opportunity for election fraud that may exist in a mail ballot system, fraudulent activities such as vote buying, coercion or undue influence on voters by family or political operatives, and, not least of all, the interception of ballots. Others raise valid concerns about the reliability of mail service in large urban areas.

Many opponents complain that mail-in balloting comes at the cost of losing the communal, civic aspect of voting at a neighborhood polling place. As Norman J. Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute framed the argument: "[Voting] should be a meaningful experience, where citizens congregate with their neighbors and affirm their joint commitment to society... Reducing the vote to the equivalent of filling out a Publisher's Clearinghouse lottery cheapens the experience." On the other hand, proponents point out that mail-in balloting can be seen "kitchen table voting" which opens opportunities for political discourse among family and friends. The argument that mail-in balloting is detrimental to civic involvement, one researcher contends, "ignores the rich 'togetherness' that can be achieved by voting at home," and fails to recognize "that there are positive benefits from the increased deliberative environment of vote by mail.

Read Project Vote's policy brief on Convenience Voting [here](#).

There are many sources of information about all-mail-ballot elections on the internet. Several sources of interest include:

<http://sos.oregon.gov/voting/Pages/voteinor.aspx>

Oregon Secretary of State, who is responsible for elections in that state

## Voting in Oregon

[Register to Vote](#)

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[Learn About Vote by Mail](#)

Oregon has the most convenient voting system in the country. Since adopting vote by mail, Oregon consistently ranks as one of the national leaders in voter turnout.

Registered voters receive a ballot two to three weeks before an election, giving them ample time to research issues or candidates.

Voters also receive an official ballot to complete and insert into the security envelope which is placed in the ballot return envelope and signed by the voter. The ballot return envelope can be stamped and mailed or simply dropped off at any official drop box across the state. If a voter casts his or her ballot after the Wednesday before an election, the ballot should be left at a drop box site to ensure it's counted.

Ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

[Update Voter Registration Information](#)

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[Absentee Voting](#)

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"Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves and the only way they could do this is by not voting."



— Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States

Protecting the Integrity of Elections

[https://wei.sos.wa.gov/agency/osos/en/voters/Pages/vote\\_by\\_mail.aspx](https://wei.sos.wa.gov/agency/osos/en/voters/Pages/vote_by_mail.aspx)

# Washington Secretary of State



Elections & Voting

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## Vote by Mail

Washington State votes by mail. Vote by mail is convenient and gives you extra time to learn about the ballot measures and candidates before casting your vote.

### 1. Receive your ballot

Your ballot is mailed to you at least 18 days before each election. To receive your ballot, your voter registration mailing address must be current. You can update your address online with MyVote.

If you are a registered voter and do not receive your ballot, contact your county elections department.

### 2. Vote your ballot

Your ballot packet will include a ballot, a secrecy envelope, and a return envelope. Follow the instructions that accompany your ballot. If you need a replacement ballot, contact your county elections department.

#### Be an informed voter

Washington has many ways to help voters become informed about ballot measures and candidates:

- The state General Election Voters' Pamphlet is mailed to every household in Washington. If you need the General Election Voters' Pamphlet in accessible formats or alternate languages, call (800) 448-4881 or email voterspamphlet@sos.wa.gov.
- For personalized ballot measure and candidate information online, go to MyVote.
- For all ballot measures and candidates, visit the Online Voters' Guide.
- For local races, visit the website for your county elections department.

Other sources of information about candidates and issues include local newspapers, television, libraries, political parties, and campaigns.

### 3. Return your ballot

Your ballot must be:

- Postmarked no later than Election Day; or
- Returned to a designated ballot drop box by 8 p.m. on Election Day; or
- Returned in person to your county elections department by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

If you fail to sign the ballot declaration, or the signature on the ballot declaration does not match the signature in your voter registration record, your county elections department will contact you. If you are unable to sign the declaration, make a mark in front of two witnesses and have them sign in the designated spaces.

Find out more about the next steps of ballot processing and secrecy.

<http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/vote/electionFactSheet.html>

Colorado Secretary of State





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## Voting by Mail

In June, 2005, Clark County became a mail ballot county. All ballots for future elections will be mailed to voters at their residential address or to any mailing address that the voter has provided the Elections Office. There will no longer be polling places where a voter can go to receive a ballot, except for the County Elections Office located at 1408 Franklin Street, Vancouver. To register and vote you need to be a resident of Clark County for at least 30 days before an election in which you wish to vote, be 18 years of age at the time you vote, be a U.S. citizen and if you have been convicted of a felony, have had your voting rights restored by the courts. All residents of Clark County who meet these requirements and submit a completed Washington State voter registration form will be mailed a ballot for each election in which they are eligible to vote.

If you are temporarily away, including serving in the military, attending college, working outside the County, traveling or for other reasons, but consider Clark County your home of permanent residence, you can be registered to vote and request that your ballot be mailed to where you currently reside and receive mail. Your ballots for all elections in which you are eligible to vote will be sent to you until such time as you change the address where you receive mail.

### How to receive and vote your ballot

- Telephone our office at (360) 397-2345. We will ask for your birthdate as authentication.
- Mail a [ballot application](#) (PDF - 46 KB) form. You must provide your name, address, birth date and phone number. The form must have your signature for authentication.
- Visit the Elections Department at 1408 Franklin St. in Vancouver.

Mail ballots will be available and mailed to the voters starting 20 days prior to an election. If you are out of the area or overseas, please make your request early enough to allow the ballot to arrive at your mailing address on time. If there are any special considerations for you to receive mail in a timely manner, please be sure to let the Elections Office know what they are. First class postage is required to mail your voted ballot to our office and must be postmarked on the day of the election or earlier.

### Keep your mailing address current!

The mail ballot request form asks for your residential address and the address you wish the ballot to be mailed. We will mail the ballot to any address where mail is delivered. Please report changes to your mailing address. If you do not promptly report a change of address, your ballot will not be forwarded to you by the Post Office. This will result in your ballot not receiving timely delivery and we cannot guarantee you will receive a ballot in time to vote.

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# Washington State's Vote-by-Mail Experience

2007







## Washington State's Vote-by-Mail Experience

Voting by mail is a Northwest phenomenon. Like their Oregon neighbors, Washingtonians appreciate the convenience of voting at home, as well as the ability to study election materials and campaign literature as they fill in their ballots. As a result, the popularity of voting by mail has soared over the years. Today, nearly every Washington county conducts all-mail elections- a movement that was not led by the state or county government, but by the people at large. Why? Voting by mail works for Washington.

Voting by mail solves one common barrier to the elections process by delivering the ballots directly to voters. Many people do not vote simply because they do not know where to vote.



*Beginning in 1993, Washington voters could request to vote-by-mail for all elections.*

People assume that they may only vote at their assigned poll sites. If they are not familiar with the location of the poll sites, they give up.

Voting by mail is convenient. Many people do not have time to go to poll sites during the day. Poll sites are assigned based on residential addresses. But most voters are not near home during the day. Rather, they are at work, at school, or handling other responsibilities of life. While polls may be open from 7:00 am until 8:00 pm, many voters simply are not near home during that time.

*“People like voting by mail- most importantly a voter spreads the ballot out across the kitchen table and really studies the issues and candidates.”*

*--Sam Reed, Washington Secretary of State*



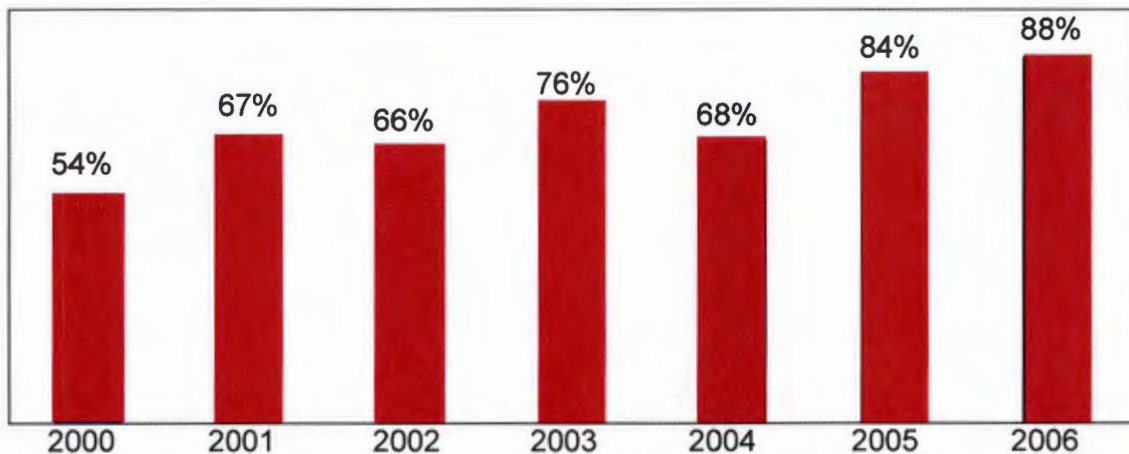


Unexpected family or work conflicts may prevent voters from getting to the polls. Voting at traditional poll sites requires many voters to rush to a poll site on the way home from work, after picking up children from daycare. Voting by mail allows people to fill out their ballots any time. Voters can find a moment that is calm and quiet which, for many people, is late at night or on the weekends. Mail ballots arrive two weeks before Election Day, providing more time to fully consider the candidates and issues than the usual ten minutes spent in poll booths.

*“When I voted at the polls, I would not read up as much. Now that I have the absentee, I have the time to really read things.”*

—Gayle, King County Elections Focus Group

### Vote-by-Mail Ballots Cast in General Elections



*The number of Washington voters who permanently cast their ballots by mail has increased dramatically.*

<u>Year:</u>	<u>Ballots Cast:</u>	<u>Vote-by-Mail Ballots Cast:</u>	<u>Percent of Ballots Cast by Mail:</u>
2000	2,517,028	1,364,607	*54%
2001	1,464,891	984,950	67%
2002	1,808,720	1,188,303	66%
2003	1,300,602	984,014	76%
2004	2,884,783	1,974,606	*68%
2005	1,850,017	1,562,434	84%
2006	2,107,370	1,864,317	88%

\* Vote-by-mail percentages decrease in Presidential years as overall participation climbs.





## History of Voting by Mail

In Washington State, County Auditors are responsible for conducting elections, and the Secretary of State serves as the chief elections officer.

As early as 1915, Washington allowed voters to cast ballots by mail if they were unable to be present at their proper precincts on Election Day. Washington further expanded mail voting incrementally. In 1974, the Legislature authorized no-excuse mail voting. This allowed voters to request mail ballots without stating a particular need. Currently, 28 states in the nation allow for no-excuse mail voting.

Beginning in 1985, voters with disabilities and those voters over the age of 65 could request to receive ballots for all future elections by mail.

In 1993, the Legislature expanded mail voting to all citizens.

*“I needed the convenience of [the absentee ballot] coming to my home. I’ve been voting absentee for ten years now.”*

—Heidi, King County Elections Focus Group

# Mail-In Voter Registration Form Secretary of State

Use Black Pen - Please Print Clearly  NAME CHANGE  ADDRESS CHANGE  SIGNATURE CHANGE  NEW REGISTRATION

<b>1</b> NOTE: Only U.S. Citizens may complete this form		FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	
Will you be at least 18 years of age or older before Election Day? <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO			
Are you a citizen of the United States? <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO			
Federal and state law require you to provide your Washington Driver's License number or Washington ID Card number. If you do not have a Washington Driver's License or Washington ID Card, provide the last four digits of your Social Security Number.			
<b>2</b> A. Washington Driver's License Number	B. Last four Digits/SSN	<input type="radio"/> Check here if you do not have a Washington Driver's License, ID Card, or SSN.	<b>4</b> Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)
<b>3</b> Last Name		<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female	Daytime Phone Number ( )
<b>5</b> First Name	Middle Name	<input type="radio"/> Jr. <input type="radio"/> II <input type="radio"/> Sr. <input type="radio"/> III	Email Address (optional)
<b>6</b> Washington Resident Address (Required)		City or Town	ZIP Code
<b>7</b> Mailing Address Where You Get Your Mail (if different from above)		City or Town	State   ZIP Code
<b>8</b> Check any that apply <input type="radio"/> Military Domestic <input type="radio"/> Military Foreign <input type="radio"/> National Guard/Reserves <input type="radio"/> U.S. Citizen Overseas		<b>9</b> ONGOING ABSENTEE REQUEST I would like to receive absentee ballots for all future elections <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO	

Voters may request registration forms in English, Chinese, Spanish, Cambodian, Korean, Laotian, Russian, and Vietnamese.





In 1967, elections in precincts with fewer than 100 registered voters could be conducted by mail. These became known as vote-by-mail precincts. The threshold was later increased to 200 registered voters.

By 2002, five rural counties were conducting all elections in the county by mail because all precincts were vote-by-mail precincts: Clallam, Ferry, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, and Skamania.

In 1983, a jurisdiction could request that a special election, such as a levy election, be conducted by mail. Beginning in 1993, County Auditors could conduct nonpartisan primaries by mail. These became known as vote-by-mail elections.

The close Governor's race in the 2004 General Election revealed a number of flaws in Washington's election system. Many investigations, oversight committees, and public hearings reviewed the events of the 2004 General Election, as well as Washington's election system generally.

A common finding was the inefficiency and high risk of error caused by administering two elections simultaneously.



*All vote-by-mail counties provide special drop boxes that allow voters to return ballots at their convenience.*



*Ballots must be postmarked by Election Day.*

### **One election is conducted by mail**

The assembly of outgoing mail ballots involves matching the correct ballots for voters with two envelopes. Large counties often have thousands of ballot styles in circulation for a single election. Ballots must be available at the county elections department 20 days before the election, and mailed 18 days before the election.

Each county elections department receives and processes the voted ballots for the following four weeks. Processing includes:

- Checking the postal date stamp to make sure that envelopes were mailed no later than Election Day;
- Checking voters' signatures on the outer envelope oath to match the signatures on file;





- Contacting voters by mail or by telephone if the signatures do not match;
- Separating the identifying outer envelopes from the inner security envelopes that contain the ballots;
- Separating security envelopes from the ballots;
- Manually inspecting the ballots to make sure that the tabulation equipment will read the ballots correctly;
- Duplicating the ballots if the tabulators will not read the ballots as intended or sending ballots to the County Canvassing Boards if voters' intent is not clearly discernible;
- Placing ballots in secure storage until Election Day; and
- Removing ballots from secure storage on Election Day and processing them through high-speed tabulators.



*Washington's largest counties can receive more than 100,000 mail ballots in one day.*

## **A second election is conducted on Election Day**

A poll election in King County requires election workers to:

- Confirm that 400 locations are available and have sufficient space, parking, lighting, and accessibility to be used as poll sites;
- Train more than 4,000 poll workers on how to handle ballots correctly, issue correct ballots to voters, answer voters' questions accurately, and operate both optical scan and touchscreen voting equipment;
- Program and test about 450 optical scan tabulators and about 450 accessible voting devices;
- Print sufficient numbers of ballots in each of the 4,000 ballot formats to meet the demand;
- Keep the various ballot styles distinct when one poll site may handle more than 60 different ballot styles; and
- Have sufficient permanent employees and experienced poll workers who can travel among the poll sites on Election Day to answer questions and resolve any problems.

## **2005 Legislation**

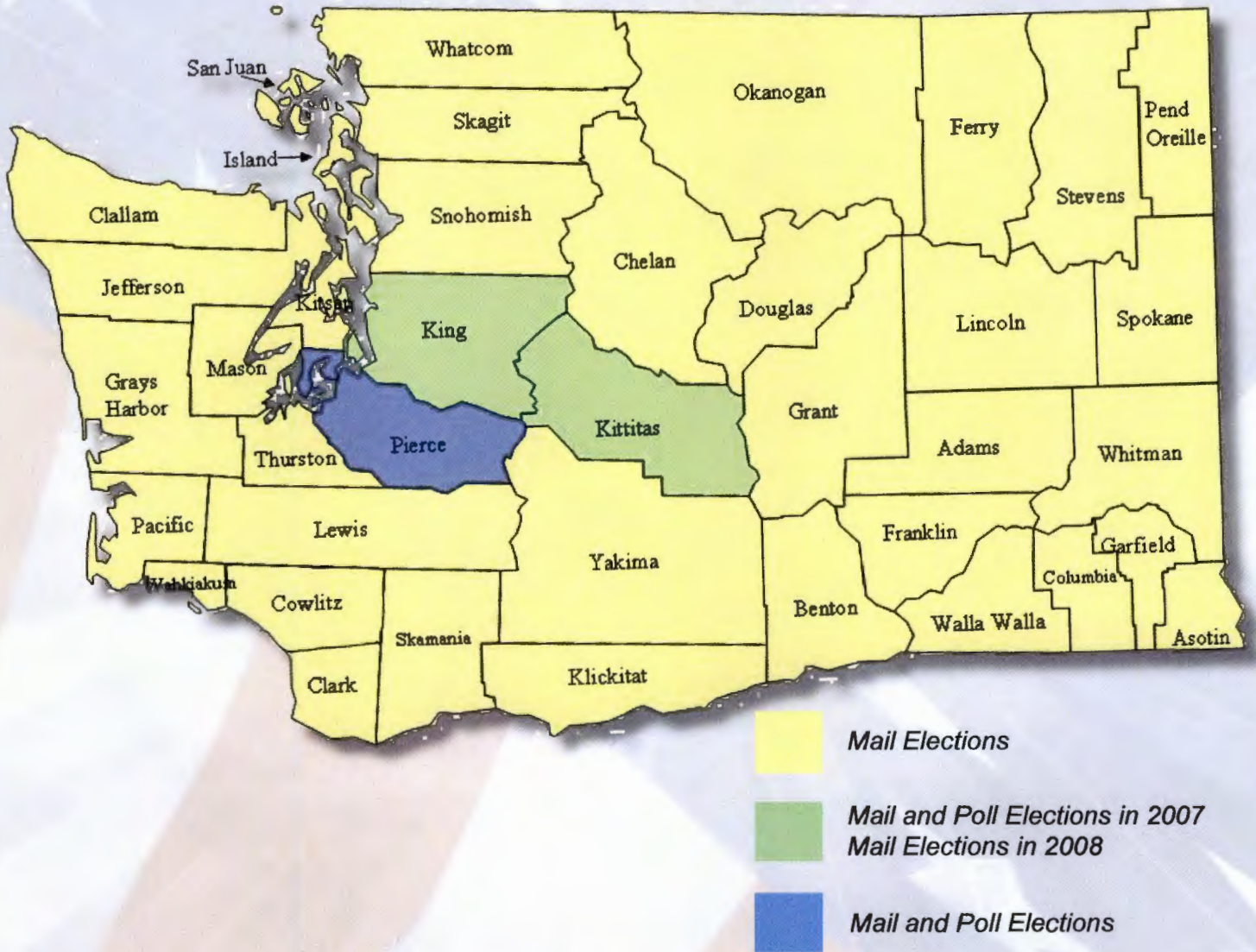
With approximately 75% of Washingtonians choosing to vote at home in 2004, the public expressed a clear preference for casting their ballots through the mail. Consequently, 2005 legislation allowed each county to decide whether to conduct all elections by mail. The legislation required the approval of both the County Auditor and the County Commission or Council. These became known as vote-by-mail counties. A timeline of Washington's progress towards voting by mail is provided in Appendix A.





## Vote-by-Mail Currently

As of October 2007, 36 of 39 counties in Washington conduct elections entirely by mail, and two additional counties, King and Kittitas, have plans to switch to vote-by-mail in 2008.



Even in counties that continue to offer poll voting, the vast majority of voters choose to cast ballots by mail. For example, in Pierce County, which continues to offer poll voting, mail ballots comprised 90% of the ballots cast in the 2006 Primary and 84% of the ballots cast in the 2006 General.





## Voting Centers

To accommodate the small population of voters that prefers to vote at the polls, many vote-by-mail counties have established community voting centers. At a community voting center, voters may drop off ballots, request provisional ballots, vote on special equipment to assist those with disabilities, and receive "I Voted" stickers.

While most ballots are received through the mail, each County Auditor is required to provide at least one location in addition to the County Auditor's Office for voters to drop off their ballots. The County Auditors are encouraged to provide additional drop sites for the voters' convenience.

Mail ballots are required to be available at the County Auditor's Office at least 20 days before Election Day and be in the mail at least 18 days before Election Day.

*“As election administrators, we have a clear duty to make voting accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities.”*

--Sam Reed, Washington Secretary of State

## Disability Access



*Starting in 2006, every county began to offer accessible voting equipment. This allowed many voters to cast secret ballots for the first time in their lives.*



*Voting equipment that accommodates people with disabilities is available for 20 days before Election Day.*

Many counties provide equipment in several locations, such as community centers or nursing homes. Counties are required to establish procedures and advisory committees to make elections more accessible to people who face barriers to voting.





## Military and Overseas Voters

The Federal Voting Assistance Program within the Department of Defense estimates that approximately 52,500 members of the military, 39,400 military dependents, and 72,400 overseas citizens claim Washington as their voting residence.

Washington law is very accommodating for military and overseas citizens to exercise their right to vote. Washington State exceeds the requirements of the Federal Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. Military and overseas voters do not have to be registered to vote in order to request a ballot. These voters may request ballots by fax, phone, or email, or by the traditional method of filling out a state or federal form. County Auditors go to great lengths to get ballots to military and overseas voters quickly. In addition to sending ballots through the U.S. mail, County Auditors can forward ballots by fax or email.



*Starting in 2007, the primary date was moved from September to August to ensure that military and overseas voters receive their ballots on time.*

Military and overseas ballots sent through the U.S. Postal Service are mailed 30 days before an election. The time period for returning ballots extends 15 days after a special election or primary and 21 days after a general election.



*The United States Postal Service is also speeding up delivery of domestic and overseas ballots by differentiating them from other political mailings.*

The Secretary of State's Office offers mail-in voter registration forms on its website. Beginning in 2008, all voters who have a Washington driver's license or state ID card will be able to register online, without the trouble of printing out the form and mailing it in. This new service will be especially convenient for those voters who are out of state or out of country.



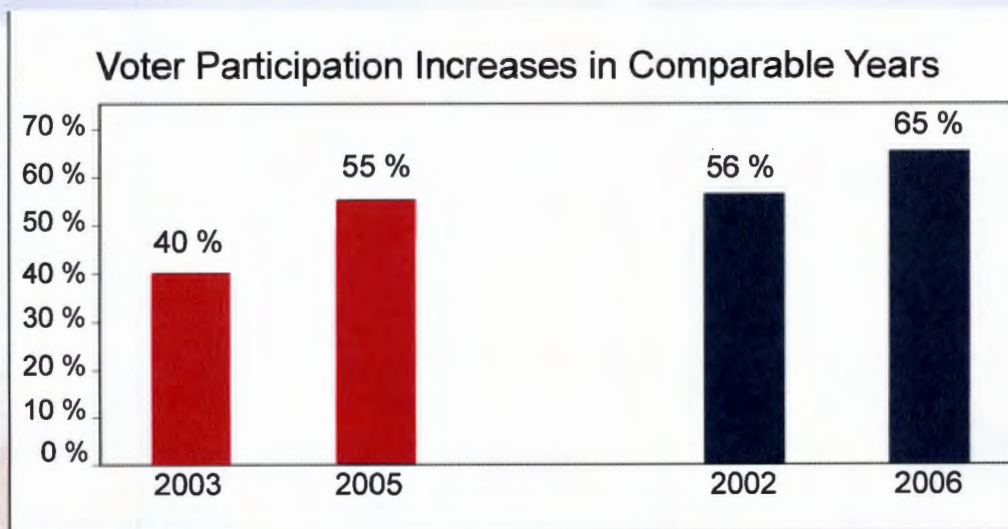


## Voter Participation

Participation is higher when the ballot arrives at home.

2007 Primary		
	Participation among Vote-By-Mail Voters	Participation among Poll Voters
King County	35%	8%
Pierce County	30%	6%

*In the 2007 Primary, participation among mail voters was more than quadruple the turnout at poll sites.*



*The preceding chart illustrates how voter turnout increased in comparable odd and even years as vote-by-mail increased in popularity.*

Voter turnout in the spring special elections has also increased dramatically. For example, turnout in the 2004 and 2005 special elections in Spokane County before that county switched to vote-by-mail averaged 39%. Turnout in the 2006 and 2007 special elections after the county switched to vote-by-mail climbed to 51%.





### Other States

Turnout in Washington has consistently been higher than in states where voting by mail is substantially limited. For example, turnout statistics for Washington and Oregon are consistently higher than states that require voters to give a reason to vote absentee, such as Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

### Voter Turnout in Other States

	1998	2000*	2002	2004*	2006
Washington	62%	76%	56%	82%	65%
Oregon	59%	80%	69%	87%	71%
Kentucky	48%	61%	48%	65%	50%
Minnesota*	61%	70%	64%	78%	60%
Montana	53%	60%	55%	71%	63%
D.C.	40%	58%	37%	60%	31%
Virginia	33%	69%	39%	71%	53%

*\* Minnesota allows Election Day voter registration.*

### Improved Election Administration

Elections are more accurate when they are conducted by mail. The election process is streamlined to allow election administrators to conduct one consolidated election rather than managing two elections: by mail and at the polls. This has provided election administrators with greater control and accuracy over elections.



*Mail elections allow county elections departments to efficiently handle large volumes of ballots together.*





While some election costs are reduced or eliminated, such as poll site rental fees, poll worker salaries and training costs, and poll site tabulators, other costs increase, such as postage and printing costs for additional ballots and envelopes.

Vote-by-mail counties have experienced significantly lower equipment costs. For example, Snohomish County currently maintains approximately 100 accessible voting devices for conducting elections by mail. If Snohomish County maintained poll sites, it would have to purchase and maintain approximately 1,000 devices.

### Up-to-Date Voter Registration Data

Vote-by-mail elections improve the accuracy of voter registration. Under a traditional poll site environment, the local elections office may send out a mailer to confirm each voter's registration information only once every two years. Voter registration files become outdated under this system because approximately 15% of the population moves each year.

Under vote-by-mail, the local elections office likely sends out three or four mailings per year. If a voter has moved, the county elections department is notified by the U.S. Postal Service. This allows the county elections department to learn more quickly that a voter is no longer at the registration address and that the statutory process for removing the voter should begin.

### More Informed Electorate

Voting by mail promotes an informed electorate. People appreciate the opportunity to study candidate and election materials while voting at home.



*Voters' pamphlets are provided to each household for each general election and most other elections. These are comprehensive guides that provide candidate statements, objective explanations of ballot measures, and arguments for and against ballot measures.*

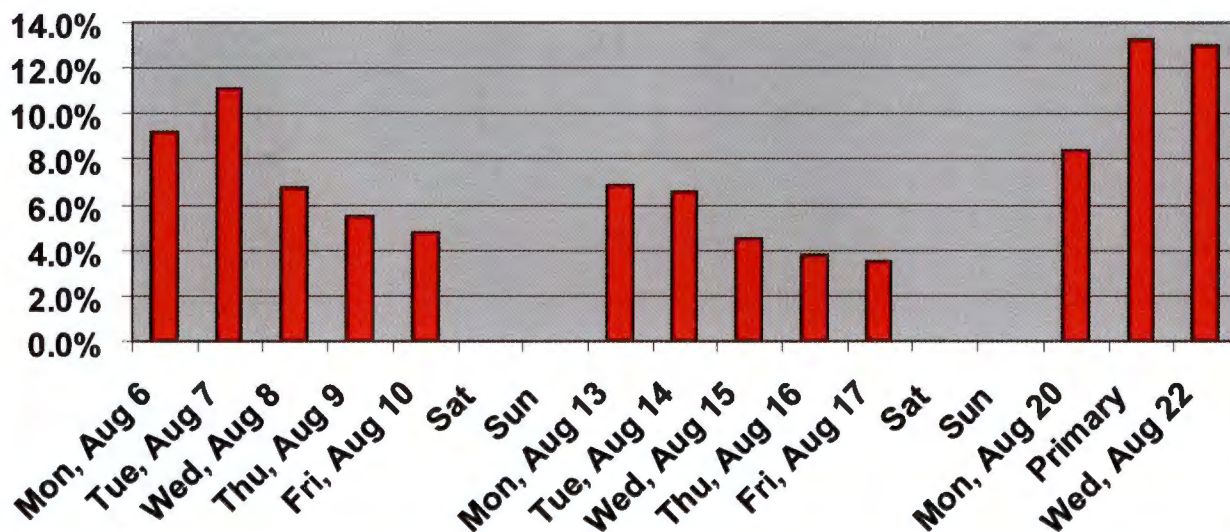
Voting by mail provides citizens with the option of voting a few races on the ballot, putting the ballot aside, and coming back to it after gathering more information.

Family discussions about the issues and candidates inspire civic engagement. Voting at home is a perfect opportunity for parents to discuss civic responsibility with their children.





**Daily Return of Mail Ballots, as a Percentage of the Total Returned in the 2007 Primary  
(Clark, Kittitas, Pierce, Spokane and Yakima Counties combined)**



*The rate that ballots are returned to county elections departments demonstrates how much the public enjoys voting at home over the weekend. Ballots voted over the weekend are processed in the mail on Monday and received by the County Auditor on Tuesday.*

**Voting by Mail in Washington is Secure**

When registering to vote, citizens must provide identification and sign an oath. Ballot materials are mailed to voters at least 18 days prior to an election. Voters are provided ballots, instructions, inner security envelopes, and outer return envelopes. Voters complete their ballots, place them in the inner security envelopes, and then place the inner envelopes in the outer return envelopes. Further, voters must sign the following on the outer return envelopes:

- I do solemnly swear or affirm under penalty of perjury that:
  - I am a legal resident of the state of Washington;

- I am entitled to vote in this election;
- I have not already voted in this election;
- It is illegal to vote if I am not a United States citizen;
- It is illegal to vote if I have been convicted of a felony and have not had my voting rights restored;
- It is illegal to cast a ballot or sign an absentee envelope on behalf of another voter; and
- Attempting to vote when not entitled, attempting to vote more than once, or falsely signing this oath is a felony punishable by a maximum imprisonment of five years, a maximum fine of \$10,000, or both.





The outer return envelope includes a secrecy flap that covers each voter's signature during transit.

Once a ballot is received in the county elections department, the voter's registration file is checked to confirm that the voter has not already returned a ballot. The voter's signature on the outer envelope is verified against the signature on file. If the signature on the envelope does not match the signature on file or if the voter failed to sign the envelope, the County Auditor must attempt to contact the voter to correct the situation.



*Ballots are secured through the use of numbered seals, seal logs, and access is documented from the time of receipt through tabulation. Ballot accountability procedures are required of each county.*



*Envelope tracking systems improve accountability by maintaining a record of which voters have returned their ballots.*

In addition to the manual methods of ballot accountability, several Washington counties have purchased automated ballot tracking systems. Depending on the particular features implemented by the county, the system can track ballots mailed to voters, ballots returned by voters, signatures on returned envelopes, when inner envelopes are removed from outer return envelopes, when ballots are removed from inner envelopes, and which ballots have been tabulated. Because the ballots are tracked in batches, the privacy of the voters' ballots is never compromised. These automated tracking systems provide a more accurate accounting of the ballots than traditional reconciliation methods implemented at polls.





## Allegations of Fraud

The most common criticism of voting by mail is that it provides greater opportunity for fraud. While this makes for interesting headlines, it rarely proves to be true. Claims that elections conducted through the mail have increased risk over elections conducted at polls do not take into account the levels of security implemented in jurisdictions that vote heavily by mail.

States that have limited mail voting often lack the security measures that ensure that the person registered to vote was the person who voted the ballot. Because these states lack a structured security system to handle volumes of mail ballots, journalists are frequently unaware of the extensive security measures that are in place in states deliberately structured for mail voting. Critics often assume that absentee ballots are simply accepted and counted, and are often unaware of the crucial element that each signature is examined against the signature on file.

Following the 2004 General Election and the subsequent gubernatorial recounts, both political parties spent a combined total of \$6.5 million contesting the election and attempting to prove that fraud occurred during the course of the election. Despite the numerous problems with the election cited by the judge, none were directly linked to voting by mail.

Contrary to allegations made by opponents to vote-by-mail, there have been no substantiated reports of voter coercion, such as a domineering spouse or a corrupt nursing home employee. Voters always have the option of coming to the county elections department to cast their ballots.

Implementation of the statewide voter registration database in 2006 has helped to ensure that only those people eligible to vote receive ballots. The voter registration database is screened daily for

duplicate registrations, monthly for deceased voters, and quarterly for felons. The screenings for duplicate registrations are especially important since they contribute to the perception of voting fraud and the assumption that people are voting multiple ballots. In 2006:

- 39,814 duplicate voter registrations were identified and cancelled accordingly;
- 40,105 registrations of deceased voters were identified and cancelled accordingly;
- 4,500 registrations of convicted felons were identified and cancelled accordingly; and
- 91,954 active and inactive voter registrations were cancelled for a variety of reasons, including:
  - upon the voter's request;
  - the voter moved and failed to reregister;
  - the voter moved out of state; or
  - the voter had been on inactive status for more than two federal elections, a time period established in federal law.

## Conclusion

Voting by mail increases turnout, simplifies the elections process, and promotes an informed citizenry. But above all else, the people of Washington strongly support it.







## Appendix A

### Washington's Progression to Voting by Mail

- 1915** A voter could request an absentee ballot if he or she expected to be at least 25 miles away from the assigned precinct on Election Day. The voter cast a ballot at a local poll site and the ballot was treated similar to a modern day provisional ballot.
- 1933** Voters with disabilities and voters over the age of 65 became authorized to vote an absentee ballot. The voter was still required to vote the ballot in the presence of an oath-subscribing officer and the ballot had to be returned or postmarked no later than the day of the election.
- 1950** Voters who did not wish to vote on Election Day due to the tenets of their religion became eligible to vote an absentee ballot.
- 1963** Voters who expected to be unavailable on Election Day due to illness became eligible to vote absentee.
- 1967** A precinct with less than 100 registered voters could be designated by the County Auditor as voting by mail, also known as a mail ballot precinct.
- 1974** All voters became eligible to request an absentee ballot.
- 1983** Special elections could be conducted by mail upon the request of the jurisdiction.
- 1985** A voter with a disability or a voter over the age of 65 could request to vote absentee on an ongoing basis.
- 1993** Nonpartisan primary elections could be conducted by mail.
- 1993** All voters could request to vote absentee on an ongoing basis.
- 2005** Counties could decide to conduct all elections by mail.
- 2007** 36 of Washington's 39 counties conduct elections entirely by mail. Two of the remaining counties have plans to switch to all mail elections in 2008.

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