



SB 138 Will Enhance Election Security, Ensure Alaskans' Freedom to Vote

Dear Co-Chairmen Stedman, Hoffman and Olson, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 138. Building on bipartisan proposals introduced last session, SB 138 would:

- **Strengthen election security** by verifying absentee voters' identity through signature matching;
- **Enhance election transparency** by improving Alaska's ballot tracking system and implementing additional transparency measures;
- Help ensure that **every eligible Alaskan will have their ballot counted** by creating a cure process for absentee ballots; and
- Allow eligible Alaskans to **more conveniently exercise their freedom to vote** by modernizing the voter registration and absentee voting processes.

My name is Peter Skopec, and I am the Director of Advocacy for Secure Democracy USA. We are a national, nonpartisan nonprofit that works across the aisle with state leaders, election administrators, and policy experts to build greater confidence in our elections and improve voter access across the United States.

We believe that strengthening election security and guaranteeing that every eligible citizen has the freedom to exercise their right to vote are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the best way to build confidence and trust in our elections is by advancing the policies contained in SB 138 that achieve both of these objectives at the same time. We applaud Senator Kawasaki and the State Affairs Committee for introducing this well-balanced bill, and we thank the esteemed members of the Finance Committee for hearing this important proposal today.

First, SB 138 will build confidence in our elections by strengthening election security. Under SB 138, the Division of Elections would verify absentee ballots by matching a voter's signature to the signature in their voter registration file – the most common and trusted way to verify absentee ballots nationwide.

Current law requires an absentee voter's ballot certificate to be notarized or witnessed. This process is unnecessarily burdensome – particularly for rural and senior voters – compared to other, equally effective forms of ballot verification. Most states – including many western,

rural states with high absentee participation rates, such as Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming – allow voters to return their absentee ballot by providing identifying information such as a voter's signature, address, and/or date of birth.

Just last month, Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin ended the state's witness requirement by signing a bill that had passed the legislature with near-unanimous bipartisan support. Now, Alaska is one of only 10 states that require voters to obtain a witness or notary signature before returning their ballot envelope. This requirement has become even more challenging in the wake of the United States Postal Service's decision, in 2020, to no longer allow Postal employees to serve as witnesses. Replacing this burdensome witness/notary requirement with more effective signature matching is an excellent improvement that would make voting more accessible to Alaskans, while protecting election security.

Second, SB 138 enhances election transparency through improvements to Alaska's absentee ballot tracking system. While Alaska already offers some level of ballot tracking, the existing system could offer voters more detailed information throughout the absentee voting process – particularly by letting them know whether their ballot was counted.

The comprehensive, free, online, mobile-friendly ballot tracking system created by SB 138 would allow voters to confirm that their absentee ballot was mailed by the Division of Elections, track its delivery to the voter, and confirm that the completed ballot was returned and counted. 14 states, including Utah, Texas, and Florida, require that voters be able to track their mail ballots in this way, and more than 30 other states also provide this critical level of detail to voters administratively. As discussed below, ballot tracking would also support Alaska's cure process, as proposed by SB 138, by helping absentee voters recognize and fix errors on their ballot envelopes.

Furthermore, SB 138 promotes transparency by requiring the counting of mail ballots to begin at least seven days before Election Day, which would help ensure faster, more accurate results and free up election officials to focus on efficient administration of Election Day voting. The bill also supports transparency and accountability by requiring risk-limiting audits of election results, and by allowing authorized election observers.

Third, SB 138 would help ensure that every eligible voter will have their ballot counted by creating a uniform, statewide cure process. Cure processes allow elections officials to contact voters to correct common, honest mistakes on their absentee ballot certificates, such as a missing signature. Not only does this measure assure Alaska voters that their ballot will be counted, but it also gives elections officials another security check to identify and address any cases of actual fraud or illegal voting.

In just the past few years, 16 states – including Texas, Louisiana, Indiana, and Kentucky – have adopted permanent or temporary cure processes. In total, 31 states across the political

spectrum, including large western and rural states like Montana, Utah, and North Dakota, notify and give voters the opportunity to cure ballots with minor mistakes.

The absence of a uniform, statewide cure process contributed to unacceptably high absentee ballot rejection rates in Alaska's elections in 2022, and has left the state vulnerable to Due Process and Equal Protection challenges under the U.S. Constitution. Combining signature verification with a cure process, as SB 138 does, is regarded as a best practice in election administration, and would greatly benefit election security and voter access.

Finally, SB 138 proposes important modernizations that will allow Alaskans to more conveniently access their freedom to vote. Among other updates, the bill allows eligible Alaskans to register to vote (or update their existing registrations) through Election Day; creates an absentee voter list that allows voters who prefer to vote by mail or are unable to vote in person to apply once and then continue to receive absentee ballots for future elections without the need to re-apply; and provides postage-paid return envelopes to absentee voters.

Every eligible voter should have the freedom to cast their ballot securely and conveniently, the confidence to know their vote was counted, and the certainty that reported election results are accurate and trustworthy. SB 138 will bring Alaska's election system in line with best practices for security, transparency, access, and accountability. In doing so, we strongly believe this legislation will strengthen the public's confidence in Alaska's elections.

We thank the esteemed members of the Finance Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on SB 138, and the State Affairs Committee for their leadership in introducing this important bill. We would be happy to provide you with any additional information, including on the implementation and effect of similar provisions in other states.

We respectfully urge you to support SB 138.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Skopec', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Peter Skopec
Director of Advocacy
Secure Democracy USA

Secure Democracy USA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to build confidence in our elections and improve voter access across the United States. Our goal is to support local election officials and state lawmakers to make elections policy that ensures our country continues to be a beacon of democracy for the entire world.

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, May 08, 2023 5:12 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Alaska voters need your support in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

Make sure the votes of people in Alaska are accurately counted by passing. This is important because SB 138 contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Sincerely,
Rev Susan Warren

[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED] e
<shanah.stone@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, May 08, 2023 5:35 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Sincerely,
Ms. Shoshanah Stone

[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED]
@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, May 08, 2023 8:19 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Sincerely,
Ms Janet Colon

[REDACTED] Lois Dr. Anchorage [REDACTED] 17-19
[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED]
@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, May 08, 2023 10:24 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters with a modified SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed.

However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill. The idea to inactivate a resident's voter registration after not voting in a single general election is ludicrous.

I hope you will chose to make voting as easy for Alaskan residents as it could possibly be. The more people voting and engaged, the better it is for all of us.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Ms. Jennifer Crosby

[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED]
<melody@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, May 08, 2023 10:30 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Partial Support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Pro:
Establish a ballot curing process, which would provide absentee voters the opportunity to fix benign mistakes with their ballots. In 2022's special election primary, we saw high rates of ballot rejection for easily correctable issues.
Improve the absentee voting experience by removing the witness signature requirement, a major reason why ballots were rejected last year, and allowing voters to vote by absentee for future regularly scheduled elections.
Allow voters to register within 30 days of an election, including Election Day.
Pre-pay postage for absentee ballots.

Against:
Stricter residency and intent-to-return requirements that may make it harder for people with unstable or inconsistent housing to demonstrate residency.
Inactivating voters' registration twice as frequently, including if they didn't vote in the last general election.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Melody Bechberger
[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED]
<Kathleengtodd@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 09, 2023 12:01 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

I urge you to consider each part of SB138 carefully. Use the criterion: "what helps the most people vote?" but also the criterion: "voters should be informed before they vote" For that second reason I am not in favor of same day registration ; I believe that people should have to be interested in the election and be present in the state long enough to register to vote or to have gotten the previous year's dividend, for example. To what are you going to compare the voter's signature if they can register and vote simultaneously?

On the other hand, what is the point of purging the voter roles more often? Should those who fail to vote in one election be penalized by not being able to vote in the next? Having to work on election day or to be far from home should not take you off the voter rolls quickly. Mail in voting should be allowed and even encouraged, with the wonderful safeguards Alaska has to be sure people don't vote twice. Minor problems with ballots should be correctable and witness signatures don't add much and may even encourage undue influence by the witnesses. Early absentee voting, whether by mail or in person solves problems for those whose schedules or mobility don't match election day parameters.

This bill has a lot of good stuff in it but also some toxic items. Please consider carefully with a mind to including the most legitimate voters - not the most voters who match your views, but the most representative, largest sample of Alaskans.

Sincerely,
Dr. Kathleen Todd

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED] <othberlin@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 09, 2023 12:02 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Sincerely,
Mr. Sven Sorge

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED]
@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 09, 2023 4:44 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Please support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

SB 138 contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections, and make our state stronger, safer, and better reflect the will and needs of all Alaskans.

During elections I see in my daily work as a public librarian how barriers to voting negatively affect everyday Alaskans. To improve voting conditions, a ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted. These provisions should be passed.

However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Sincerely,
Ms. Katelyn Rose
[REDACTED]

Doniece Gott

From: [REDACTED]
<eycewolf@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 09, 2023 7:58 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters in SB 138

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing today to ask that the Senate Finance Committee passes a version of SB 138 that supports Alaskans' access to the ballot. I support SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and therefore I think it should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters because it is too convoluted and will not support otherwise eligible Alaskans' from voting, and should not be included in the bill.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Fenra Bondarenko

[REDACTED] eycewolf@gmail.com

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 09, 2023 8:18 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support Alaska voters in SB 138

SB 138 is important because it contains provisions to improve Alaska's elections. A ballot curing system, same-day registration, removing the witness signature requirement, and providing paid postage for absentee ballots would help Alaskans engage in elections and ensure our votes are counted, and should be passed. However, the new residency requirements and more frequent voter registration inactivation notices may disenfranchise voters and should not be included in the bill.

Don't let false fears about voter fraud trick you into disenfranchising your fellow Alaskans. Less than 0.0025% of absentee ballots are fraudulent; that is a quarter of a hundredth of a percent. It's a tiny amount. Anyone pushing that the line that absentee ballot fraud is a problem is a coward, has been lied to, or is purposefully and knowingly lying to you in order to trick you. You can be better. The choice to do so is yours.

Please support SB 138.

Sincerely,
Dr. Joshua Knicely