

January 30, 2025

The Honorable Scott Kawasaki
Chair, Senate State Affairs
Beltz 105
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801
Via: Senate.State.Affairs@akleg.gov

Dear Chair Kawasaki,

Get Out the Native Vote (GOTNV) is a statewide non-partisan voter education program offered by Cook Inlet Tribal Council based in Anchorage. It was our honor to testify to the committee on our observations in voter access issues of the 2022 Mid-Term elections, and thank you for welcoming our comments again in the spirit of election reform.

SB64 ELECTIONS and SB70 SCHOOL & ELECTION BOARDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS cover many salient issues. Together, we could all see to effective measures to ease the barriers to voting for all Alaskans, and endeavor to ensure every vote cast is successfully counted and voter intent is fully reflected in the results.

In SB64, whenever acceptable forms of ID are mentioned, we urge the Legislature to be mindful that Tribal IDs fall under that recognition. There remain difficulties for rural residents in roadless areas to access a DMV, and it is not required until early adulthood. Tribal IDs are more accessible and ubiquitous.

A DMV derived form of ID presents an undue burden to many rural residents, and SB70s proposal to hold the DMV as the only functionary to enroll in the automatic voter registration process will create a highly effective barrier to registering to vote. Alaskan voters resoundingly directed the state to provide for automatic voter registration through the highly popular PFD application process in 2016, and we remain committed to that ideal along with the DMV route.

There have been instances in recent history where a rural precinct has successfully conducted an election, but their votes were not added to the final results because of postal issues. If, for example, Venetie or Holy Cross has had difficulty in being able to participate in any of the three statewide elections in 2022, as Newtok, Mertarvik, or Chignik has for the past dozen years or so, is it fair to remove their voters from the master list as being inactive? As for ballots that are postmarked after the election deadline, would those voters in some way be counted as active?

Same-day registration establishes a highly accommodating one-stop-shop to participate in the election. It minimizes drop-off rates of voter intent because it removes confusion over different dates, deadlines and precinct locations. In the way eligible voters are allowed to register and vote on election day in a presidential election, same day registration for all statewide races should increase overall voter turnout and lessen the need for questioned ballots, thus lowering the rate of partially accepted ballots.

Through CITC's GOTNV program, we fully support the creation of a rural community liaison in Section 16 to help facilitate access to early and absentee voting in rural areas of the state and ensure that precincts are fully staffed. More robust staffing in rural precincts will add to more awareness, preparation, and commitment to vote in upcoming elections. This investment would ease the load of the Region IV (R4) Supervisor which has suffered a troubling vacancy rate for the last few election cycles, and for other roadless rural areas. It would also free up resources GOTNV has dedicated to helping cover election staffing, retention, and registration needs on top of our demanding voter education mission.

We encourage language in the bill to include schools and school districts to the collaborative role of recruiting Youth at the Booth to help run elections and become active citizens. It would bolster election worker experience, and plant seeds for new generations of super voters. GOTNV helped 113 students sign up at Youth Ambassadors in 2024 but only 15 were pressed into service at a rate of 13.5%.

In order to more easily search our position on sections of interest, we are truncating our responses here:

SB64

Section 19 support efforts for language assistance to be posted at each polling place

Section 22 supports the expedition of early vote counts

Section 25 supports the postage-paid return envelope for absentee ballots

Section 25, 27 and Section 31 removes the witness signature requirement

In 2022's all VBM special primary, 7,500 ballots were rejected for the following reasons:

- No witness signature 2724
- Ballot postmarked after election day 1897
- No identifier provided 1556

HDs 19, 37, 38, 39, and 40 suffered the highest number of rejected ballots due to the witness provision at a rate of 14% In 2024's general election, 512 ballots were rejected due to missing signatures at a rate of 8%. Reform of this requirement is imperative.

Section 26 support the easing of the top causes for rejection rates of special needs ballots

Section 34 Support a ballot-tracking system

Section 15.20.222. Procedure for curing uncounted ballot is on point – line 05 on Page 20 asks for the voter to provide a **copy** of a form of identification, this presents a barrier for many residents in rural Alaska, as they likely do not have access to a copier or printer

Section 15.20.810 We fully support drop boxes for elections conducted by mail, and appreciate the potential for precincts with less than a 20,000 population to be eligible for drop box placement

Section 42 AS 29.26.050 Appreciate the intent of encouraging municipality voters to be recognized in statewide elections

Section 47 support any effort to expanding early voting in rural communities and low-income neighborhoods

SB70

Section 6. AS 15.07.050 line 01 (5) Urge the continuation of PFD automatic voter registration

Section 7. AS 15.07.060 (e) line 11 – 13, Tribal IDs should always be included

Section 9. AS 15.07.130 (a) concerned that a 45-day turnaround is difficult with R4 postal issues

Section 11. AS 15.15.060 (a) Support the ability to secure alternative polling sites as circumstances arise

Section 15.15.380. Support further compensation for election workers

Section 14 AS 15.20.030 Fully support postage prepaid and pre-addressed return envelope for absentee voters - lines 13 and 14 still require the outsized hindering witness signature requirement

Section 15 AS 15.20.064 Support the opportunity for early voting to start 15 days before an election, but object to closing 5 days before election day

Section 16 AS 15.20.072 Better accommodations for special needs voters and their representative

Section 17 AS 15.20.081 It is not possible for absentee ballots to return to base by election night

Section 19 AS 15.20.201 Earlier counts of absentee ballots is welcome

Section 22 AS.20.800 (a) An automatic all Vote By Mail for every special election is tricky for Rural Alaska and low-income community precincts. Designating communities of under 750 people to be subject to all VBM elections effectively sets R4, other small roadless, and low-income communities to suffer already untenable rates of rejection

CITC's GOTNV program is here to lessen barriers to voting for all Alaskans, and we feel this election reform is a chance to make voting a more equitable experience in the pursuit of a more representative government.

Quyana,



Michelle (Macuar) Sparck
Get Out the Native Vote
Director of Strategic Initiatives

p.s. Enclosed is our letter of support for HB246 from 2023 that would allow for minors at least 16 years of age to preregister to vote, a provision that is now absorbed into SB64