

Joe Hayes

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 4, 2025 1:05 PM  
**To:** Joe Hayes  
**Subject:** Fw: Support SB 52 – Strengthening Election Timeliness & Public Confidence in Alaska

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** "Senate.State.Affairs@akleg.gov" <Senate.State.Affairs@akleg.gov>  
**Sent:** Tue, Feb 4, 2025 at 12:55 PM  
**Subject:** Support SB 52 – Strengthening Election Timeliness & Public Confidence in Alaska

### ***Alaska Senate State Affairs Committee***

Dear Senators,

I write to you today in **strong support of SB 52**, which seeks to **modernize and improve Alaska's election process by ensuring our election results are reported in a timely manner, just like the rest of the country.**

As you are aware, **Alaska is consistently the last state in the nation to report election results.** This delay is not just a minor inconvenience—it actively undermines **public confidence, weakens Alaska's national influence, and reduces the efficiency of our election system.** SB 52 presents a **responsible, well-crafted, and common-sense solution** that ensures Alaskan voters can trust our elections while maintaining fairness and accessibility.

Opponents of this bill have raised several concerns, which I want to address head-on to clarify why **SB 52 is not only necessary but long overdue.**

## **Addressing the Concerns Raised by Opponents**

### **1. Myth: SB 52 Will Disenfranchise Alaskans in Rural Areas**

#### **Reality: The Bill Protects Rural Voters While Improving Election Efficiency**

Opponents argue that **moving up ballot receipt deadlines will disenfranchise rural voters** who rely on absentee or mail-in ballots. This is simply not the case.

- **SB 52 includes critical exceptions for weather and mechanical delays**, ensuring that Alaskans who face unavoidable challenges in returning their ballots on time will not be penalized.
- The current system already has deadlines for ballots, and **other states with rural populations manage to report election results on time** without disenfranchising their voters.
- It is not reasonable to **keep the entire state's election results on hold for days or even weeks** because of a small number of delayed ballots. SB 52 ensures **we count and process ballots efficiently without excluding anyone.**

## 2. Myth: Changing the Timeline Will Strain Election Officials

### Reality: SB 52 Will Make Elections Easier to Manage

Some claim that earlier deadlines would **put excessive strain on election workers**. In reality, SB 52 does the **opposite**:

- The bill sets **clear, realistic deadlines** that allow election officials to **process absentee and early votes in a structured, predictable way** rather than the chaotic, drawn-out process we currently endure.
- **Other states manage to certify their elections quickly and efficiently**, even with larger populations and more complex voting systems. Alaska, with fewer than **800,000 people**, can and should do the same.
- Delays **erode public trust**—when election results drag on, **voters begin to question the process**. SB 52 helps our election workers by giving them a **clearer, more efficient framework to follow**.
- **Election officials are often overworked, leading to mistakes**. I have personally worked as an election official and poll watcher, and I have seen firsthand how the **Division of Elections could better utilize its volunteers**. Instead of requiring workers to endure long, consecutive days of tedious, detail-oriented work, the state should **increase the number of volunteers and shorten their shifts** to allow for rest and recovery. Fatigue leads to **errors in ballot processing**, and with the **majority of election volunteers being over the age of 60**, it is essential to create a **structured and manageable schedule** that maintains accuracy and efficiency in our elections.

## 3. Myth: Alaska's Unique Geography Justifies Delayed Election Results

### Reality: Our Geography Is a Factor, but It Should Not Be an Excuse for Incompetence

Alaska's vast and challenging geography does create **logistical difficulties**, but that should not be a justification for keeping our election results **weeks behind the rest of the country**.

- Many individual **counties in the Lower 48 have larger populations than Alaska's entire state**—and yet they **report complete election results on time**.
- With **advancements in technology, mail delivery, and ballot tracking**, there is no reason why Alaska cannot implement a **more efficient election process**.
- **Alaskans deserve better**. We should not accept being **the last to report results** simply because we are used to it. SB 52 ensures that we have a process that **respects our geography while also making Alaska competitive with the rest of the nation**.

## 4. Myth: The Current System Works Fine – There's No Need to Rush Results

### Reality: Being Last Hurts Alaska's National Influence & Public Trust in Elections

It is unacceptable that **our elected officials must wait longer than any other state** to begin their work in Washington, D.C. **Congress does not wait for Alaska**.

- Our **one U.S. Representative and two U.S. Senators** are placed at a disadvantage when our elections take **days or weeks** to be finalized. While other newly elected members are making committee assignments, engaging in policy discussions, and positioning themselves in leadership roles, **our representatives are still waiting for certification**.
- The credibility of our elections depends on **timeliness**. Every day that passes **without a clear winner**, public confidence declines. Voters begin to question whether ballots are being tampered with, whether officials are handling votes fairly, and whether the system is working as it should.

**Joe Hayes**

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**From:** Robert Welton <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 4, 2025 7:45 AM  
**To:** Senate State Affairs  
**Subject:** Public Comments on SB 52

**Public comments on Senate Bill 52,  
Thirty-fourth Legislature, First Session, Senate State Affairs Committee, February 4, 2025**

Robert Welton  
Unaffiliated  
Douglas

Overall, SB 52 is a good effort to allow an earlier start to counting absentee ballots. This will help the Division of Elections to complete the vote tally more quickly, which will increase trust in the system. I have a few specific comments below:

Section 1 and 2- This section removes the prohibition on starting to count ballots before elections close. This will speed up getting votes counted, and elections certified. I am concerned about a statutory requirement that all votes be tabulated and counted by 11:59pm on election day. Section 6 allows absentee ballots to arrive as late as election day. If they arrive late in the day, it would cut down on time available to review them by midnight. Absentee and questioned ballots require additional review before they're counted. I would defer to the Division of Elections as to whether this is possible. But it gives me concern.

Section 3- I'm not sure a "transparent" container would be as secure as a rugged metal one. To me transparent means plastic or glass. I suggest deleting the word 'transparent', and letting the Division decide on the best container.

Section 4- Ending early voting the Saturday preceding election day will free up Division of Elections staff, to begin an earlier review and count of absentee ballots, as authorized in earlier sections. This change makes sense.

Section 6-7- Requiring absentee ballots be received by the day of the election, instead of merely being postmarked by the election date and received 10 days later, will speed up the review and tabulation of absentee ballots. That said, this could impact the deadline imposed in sections 1-2.

Section 9 makes a helpful distinction on counting absentee ballots. It adds the phrase ballots "that have been reviewed" to the 11:59pm deadline. As mentioned previously, absentee ballots require additional verification and review before they can be counted.

The same is true of questioned ballots. Questioned ballots will generally be turned in at precincts, and need to be submitted to the Division of Elections. These ballots must then be reviewed to determine if they are properly cast. I don't see an exception to the 11:59pm requirement for questioned ballots in this bill. Perhaps the exception is in the bill, and I missed it. I'd ask clarification on this point.

The subjects mentioned above repeat in sections 10-11

Section 13 tightens timelines on recounts, which should speed up the process.

Overall I think this bill makes some good changes to how elections are conducted. I do suggest the Committee look into the concerning items I've highlighted.

Thank you for your time, and service to the State of Alaska.