



March 2021

The National Vote at Home Institute

In Support of Alaska's HB 66

Thank you Chair Kreiss-Tomkins, Sponsor Tuck, and committee members for the opportunity to submit a letter of support for HB 66. The National Vote at Home Institute is pleased to support this bill and we are grateful for the hard work and consideration put into its creation.

The National Vote at Home Institute (NVAHI), is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to making sure every American can vote in secure, safe, accessible, and equitable elections by expanding vote-at-home systems in all 50 states.

We are pleased to support HB 66 because it is a shining example of a bill that puts the voters first. It removes obstacles both big and small to casting a ballot, such as having to apply for a mail ballot for each election and being forced to find a witness or notary when casting a mail ballot. Additionally, HB 66 will reduce rejection rates by allowing voters to fix issues with their ballots through a cure process. This doesn't just help voters that vote by mail: it will also greatly increase the speed and efficiency of the counting process all around. We have also been pleased to see that the bill puts voter convenience at the forefront by adding prepaid postage so voters don't need to have stamps on hand or know the exact postage rate for their ballot.

Currently in Alaska, voters that want to vote absentee must apply for an absentee ballot for every single election. Not only is this a burden on voters, it's also an expensive administrative burden on local election officials since they must process all requests; election after election, year after year from many of the same voters. Creating a permanent absentee list would ease the burden placed on both voters and election officials. We are very supportive of the changes in this bill that will save everyone time and resources that can be put to use elsewhere.

In fact, Alaska already successfully offers a single sign-up option to some disabled voters, where voters will be mailed a ballot for every election and won't have to keep track of a variety of deadlines in order to receive a ballot and participate. We believe deeply in giving voters more options to cast their votes in a way that is convenient for them and this bill does exactly that.



March 2021

Election officials, on the other hand, will save the time and money they might have otherwise spent processing absentee ballot requests for voters who regularly vote by mail ballot. Our organization now estimates that it costs on average \$1 for an office to process an individual absentee ballot request. By expanding the a permanent list, Alaska could save approximately \$200k¹ each election cycle simply by eliminating duplicate requests for each election and sending out absentee ballots from an ongoing list rather than processing individual requests.

HB 66 is comprehensive in that it responds to the recent increases in mail ballots by also implementing prepaid postage, a cure process, and removing witness requirements, the latter of which was a highly popular change implemented during the 2020 elections. In the same manner, HB 66 takes a holistic approach and fortifies overall trust in the election results by allowing absentee ballots to be counted in a similar time frame to that of in-person ballots.

We applaud the thought and consideration put into HB 66 to build upon the successes of 2020. We are glad to lend our support as the bill continues through the process and look forward to working with the legislature to refine the details with technical amendments to ensure that processes are beneficial for both election officials and the voters they work so hard to serve.

¹ Based on number of mail ballot applications in the [November 2020 election](#) and [state primary](#)



March 28, 2021

Rep. Chris Tuck
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Rep. Tuck,

We are writing to express our support and appreciation for House Bill 66: Elections, Voting, Ballots. This bill is long overdue and will go a long way toward improving access to voting by removing barriers that impede Alaskans' ability to express their voice in our elections.

Native Peoples Action is a statewide non-profit organization that strives to provide Alaska Native communities and our traditional values with a voice at all levels of policy making. The foundation of our work focuses on advocacy, education and information sharing, supporting local decision-making, and building stronger unity among Indigenous communities to collectively address issues impacting our ways of life.

Alaska has a history of discrimination and high barriers for Alaska Natives to even be allowed to participate in an election. From the 1925 Alaska voter literacy test (explicitly meant to disenfranchise Alaska Natives) to today's insufficient access to polling locations, continued efforts for increased voter ID laws, lack of translation support and lack of accessible voting information in all parts of Alaska, and more, it has not been an easy path to enfranchisement. This has only been compounded by the removal of safeguards in the past decade, through decisions like *Shelby County v. Holder*. Additionally, it has taken more drastic measures of lawsuits to make movement in our state to decrease the barriers to voting for Alaska Native people, such as *Toyukak vs. Mallott*, a landmark case in Alaska's history that emerged when the state failed to provide language assistance in Western Alaska.

During the 2020 elections, additional barriers to voting were brought on by the global pandemic, some of which should have been eased with the help and preparations of the state. Alaskans had to bring multiple lawsuits against the State of Alaska, the Division of Elections, and the Lt. Governor in order to address simple voting reforms to help keep Alaskans safe during COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these reforms included sending out absentee ballot applications to all registered Alaskan voters and removing witness signatures, which were important to protect the health of Alaskans by not making them choose between voting and



getting sick. Adequate safeguards and information on voting during the pandemic were not implemented.

Other systemic barriers disenfranchised voters during this last election cycle including not adequately staffed polling locations, which we have seen over and over again, and each year we continue to hear the need for increased training for poll workers. The residents of [Mertarvik](#) [were denied the opportunity to vote](#) in the 2020 primary election because the Division of Elections failed to send ballots. Additionally, Newtok never received supplies for its election, resulting in only 17 people voting in the primary. In some communities it was up to Tribal and community leaders to pass out and collect ballots from their neighbors to ensure everyone had the opportunity to vote.

Other statements we heard from Alaskans across the state include:

- “Did not receive my requested absentee ballot.” Mail can often take much longer across rural Alaska, this is why both in-person and by-mail voting is needed in each community.
- “Mail-in ballot was rejected with no opportunity to clarify or fix the mistake to ensure my vote could be counted.” Many states across the country offer the opportunity to ‘cure’ their ballot, Alaska does not allow this currently, this needs to be changed to ensure all individuals can have their vote counted.
- Multiple communities Native Peoples Action was in contact with during the 2020 elections requested stamps to be sent to them so individuals could mail back their absentee ballots. Some stated they relied on neighbors for a postage stamp because their post office was closed. Postage-paid return envelopes would solve this problem.
- “Could not access my polling location, the river was not frozen enough to cross to get to my polling location.” Permanent absentee voting is one way to help individuals receive a ballot automatically while working to ensure polling locations are accessible.
- Lock downs were identified as a voting barrier as individuals were not sure whether they were able to leave their home to vote. More messaging from the Division of Elections would have been helpful to communities so everyone knew the rules on how to vote during lockdowns and the pandemic. This was a foreseen issue that was not addressed. Other actions that could have been taken include sending absentee ballot applications to all registered voters and working with communities to ensure ballots were available to those who wanted to vote.
- Voters reported arriving at their polling location and being told they were not registered, despite years of voting at that location. Same-day voter registration would allow these individuals to still be able to vote.



As elections are changing and systemic disenfranchisement continues, the need for voting reforms is clear. Voting is a fundamental right of all individuals. Every Alaskan should have the ability to choose who they want to represent them and know that the state will do whatever it can to ensure every Alaskan can participate in democracy.

House Bill 66 is a step in the right direction with the requirement for election officials to notify a voter if their absentee ballot is rejected and allow the opportunity to correct the mistake on their ballot to ensure their vote is counted, eliminating the witness requirement for absentee ballots, increasing the pay of poll workers to compensate for their time and service to our state and communities, allowing absentee ballots to be counted as they are received instead of waiting until after the polls close on election day, calling for the same early voting locations to be available during every election as long as it's feasible for consistency for the voters, creating an option for permanent absentee voting for individuals that plan to vote by mail in every election, requiring the Division of Elections to provide a postage-paid return envelope with absentee ballots, and clarifying terminology for early voting to remove confusion between early voting and absentee in-person voting. These are all straight-forward reforms that will help increase access to all Alaskans.

We encourage all legislators to support this common-sense legislation. In addition, we hope that this is not the only step, but the first of many, to work towards a system in Alaska that makes voting more accessible for all Alaskans. We look forward to working with the entire legislature to continue to improve our voting system.

We wish you success with this legislation and hope your colleagues will agree this important bill should be passed this year. Thank you for your leadership in this issue. We stand ready to help in any way possible.

Gunalchéesh/Háw'aa/Quyana/Mahsi'/Baasee'/Maasee'/Dogedinh/Thank you,

Kendra Kloster
Executive Director
Native Peoples Action

Dear Alaska Lawmakers,

In an extraordinary outpouring of political expression, more Alaskans cast ballots for local, state and national candidates and initiatives during the election of November 2020 than ever voted before. Alaskans mirrored their compatriots elsewhere in the nation who also turned out in record numbers. That this occurred amid and despite the social and economic turmoil of a tragic global pandemic makes it all the more remarkable.

That torrent of sentiment and participation in democracy from all sides of the political spectrum might not have happened, given the necessary restrictions forced upon us by the pandemic, if commonsense accommodations had not been made in Alaska and elsewhere, making it safer to vote.

In many states, including Alaska, the response to these dramatic increases in voter turnout has led to the introduction of bills specifically crafted to ensure that such high levels of participation never happen again by radically restricting access to the polls. Opponents of expanded voting rights are arguing from the profoundly incorrect notion that there were wholesale irregularities and fraud associated with the 2020 election. That simply isn't true and numerous studies, investigations, and court rulings have highlighted that error. Such dangerous and fanciful thinking was magnified and manipulated by politicians who fear they will lose elections if more citizens utilize their Constitutional voting franchise.

In Alaska, measures seeking to restrict access to the polls include HB 23, HB 95 and its companion SB 82, as well as HB 96 and its companion SB 83, SB 39, and SB 43.

Among these various measures are provisions erecting barriers to voting access by making it more difficult to register to vote, severely limiting options now available to rural communities to run their own elections, and imposing restrictions that make it more difficult for neighbors to aid the elderly or infirm in casting their ballots. One additional bill, SB 23, would prohibit severability in citizens' initiatives, a provision said "to likely be an unconstitutional restriction" in a previous version of the bill.

Why would Alaska lawmakers who claim to revere democracy want less citizen participation in exercising the Republic's most fundamental franchise?

Alaska is hardly alone. According to the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice, by mid-February, 250 bills seeking to contract voter access had been filed

by Republican lawmakers in 43 states. The danger to democracy inherent in such bills has not been lost on a national electorate newly awakened to its power at the polls, and that electorate has compelled action by Congress.

U.S. House Resolution 1, the For the People Act, which has already been passed by the House and sent to the Senate, would revitalize and strengthen voting rights through federal law, negating these restrictive and anti-democratic state bills. But we cannot depend on successful passage of H.R. 1. Any moves by Alaska lawmakers to impede voting must be opposed by public outcry coupled with resolute and diligent efforts to broaden and secure our voting rights.

House Bill 66, introduced by Rep. Chris Tuck (D-Anchorage), would accomplish that by making permanent the temporary changes instituted in response to the pandemic, such as by making early voting locations available during every future election and by eliminating the unnecessary witness requirement for absentee ballots. HB 66 would serve to modernize elections through such measures as allowing electronic signatures for registering voters, creating options for permanent absentee voting by mail, and requiring the Division of Elections to provide postage-paid return envelopes for absentee balloting.

These steps would expand access to the polls for all Alaskans, boosting the collective volume of their voices via the ballot box. What better way to enhance democracy, especially in a state whose geography makes elections difficult to begin with?

Elections that “let the chips fall where they may,” conducted after candidates and ideas have been afforded equal opportunity to influence the electorate, lie at the very heart of our democracy. Democracy only works properly, though, when it is easy for voters to exercise their franchise.

Thus, we the undersigned urge you to encourage even more Alaskans to participate by passing HB 66. Elections may produce results we don’t like, but we should never fear holding them within an open and unbiased framework backed by law.

Sincerely,

Confirmed Names:

Legislative District:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. Harold O. Spence | D31 |
| 2. Lynn Takeoka Spence | D31 |

3. Willy Dunne	D31
4. Linda Wagner	D31
5. Holly Van Pelt	D31
6. Rex Murphy	D31
7. Therese Lewandowski	D31
8. Louis Dupree	D31
9. Gary Waltenbaugh	D31
10. Evelyn Waltenbaugh	D31
11. Robert Vernon	D31
12. Laurie Daniel	D31
13. Sue Christiansen	D31
14. Clyde Boyer	D31
15. Vivian Finlay	D31
16. Nina Faust	D31
17. Carol Swartz	D31
18. Kathy Hill	D31
19. Pat Cue	D31
20. Ronald L. Keffer	D31
21. Eileen Bechtol	D31
22. Ken Landfield	D31
23. Karen Murdock	D31
24. Bill Marshall	D31
25. Paul Seaton	D31
26. Tina Seaton	D31
27. Timothy Whip	D31
28. Elizabeth Whip	D31
29. Nancy Lee-Evans	D31
30. Bob Shavelson	D31
31. William A. Koeninger	D31
32. William H. Bell MD	D31
33. Mary Lou Kelsey	D31
34. Jack Oudiz	D31
35. Stuart Schmutzler	D31
36. Joy Steward	D31
37. Milli Martin	D31
38. Richard Gustafson	D31
39. Michael A. LeMay	D31
40. Hal Smith MD	D31
41. Susan McLane	D31
42. Mary Whiteley	D30
43. Gary Whiteley	D30
44. Ann Agosti-Hacket	D31
45. Don Reed	D31

46. Janie Leask	D31
47. Eric Knudtson	D31
48. Angela Newby	D31
49. Chris Newby	D31
50. Jim Lavrakas	D31
51. Ruth Lavrakas	D31
52. Cynthia Morelli	D31
53. Elizabeth A. Siegel	D31
54. Katherine George	D31
55. Megan O'Neill	D31
56. Marjorie Ringer	D31
57. Lynda Raymond	D31
58. J. Arlene Ronda	D31
59. Lee R. Page	D31
60. Jane Handy	D31
61. Flo Larson	D31
62. Lolita Haber	D31
63. Kat Haber	D31
64. Elise Boyer	D31
65. Virginia VanWagoner	D31
66. Steve VanWagoner	D31
67. Helen Gustafson	D31
68. Steve Gibson	D31
69. Nancy Vait	D31
70. Leo Vait	D31
71. Kathryn L. Carssow	D31
72. James Lunny	D31
73. Ed Berg	D31
74. Sara Berg	D31
75. Rika Mouw	D31
76. John Mouw	D31
77. Susanne Ratcliffe Wilson	D31
78. Josephine Ryan	D31

Letter of Support from Mat-Su Constituents for HB66: Elections, Voting, and Ballots

Dear Alaska House and Senate Legislators,

The largest voter turnout in Alaska on November 3, 2020, was due to a number of policies, some of which were implemented temporarily, and others that have been in place for a number of years.

House Bill 66 would put into law some of the temporary policies that were implemented due to the COVID pandemic and others that would make voting easier for all Alaskans, a goal that we all support.

We mention a few of the key provisions that HB66 would codify.

It would require the Division of Elections to provide postage for the absentee ballots. This past election, it was particularly irksome that the voter had to provide their own postage and many voters had difficulties understanding which postage stamp to use. The Mat-Su Borough provided the return postage for their local elections thus eliminating any confusion and making it easy to return the ballot.

It would eliminate the witness requirement for absentee ballots. The voter is already required to provide an identifier and the requirement for a witness signature is redundant. In the November 2020 election the Courts ruled that a witness signature was not required and yet there was no widespread fraud with the absentee ballots.

It would permit voters to “cure” their ballot absentee ballot for any errors. Eighteen states already permit voters to correct signature discrepancies.

The overall goal of increasing Alaska voter participation, either by absentee or in-person voting, should be the goal of any bill that addresses elections, instead of putting up barriers for voters.

Thank you for moving HB66 to law.

Affirmed Names (22)

Dave Musgrave, HD9
Marilyn E Parker, HD10
Patricia Chesbro, HD12
Jim Cooper, HD11
Monica Stein-Olson, HD10
Patricia Fisher, HD8
Bill Johnson, HD9
Ron Clarke, HD9
Kendra Zamzow, HD9
Casey Steinau, HD8
Valerie Barber, HD9
G.R. (Bob) Covington, HD11
Carolyn Covington, HD11
Frankie Barker, HD9
Valerie Mittelstead, HD12
Norm Stout, HD8
Connie Patrick-Harris, HD9
Norman Rex Harris, HD9
Bob Thompson, HD9

Carol Thompson, HD9
Steve Charles, HD10
Rus'sel Sampson, HD10

March 18, 2021

To: Representative Chris Tuck (via Homer LIO)

Reference: **HB 66A Elections, Voting, Ballots (IN SUPPORT)**

I **strongly support** the intent of HB 66A: removal of barriers to the ballot box.

Since the failure of “reconstruction” after the Civil War, our country has had a sad legacy of voter suppression, often under the guise “election security”. Efforts at voter suppression continue today.

I believe our dedicated election officials, poll workers and poll watchers in Alaska have proven that our State is perfectly capable of running a secure election process.

The only issue I might have with this bill is the “postage paid return envelope”: IF this provision could result in wasted (unused) postage. In that case, I would be happy to provide my own postage should I choose the absentee ballot.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wayne Aderhold", written in a cursive style.

Wayne Aderhold

353 Grubstake Ave.

Homer, AK 99603