



CSSB39(JUD) Will Strengthen Public Confidence in Alaska's Elections Systems

Dear Chairman Holland and esteemed members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in strong support of the committee substitute to Senate Bill 39. My name is Charley Olena, I am the Senior Director of Advocacy for Secure Democracy USA, a national, nonpartisan nonprofit that works to build confidence in our elections and improve voter access across the United States. We work across the aisle to educate policymakers and the public about what it takes to safeguard and improve our voting systems. We collaborate with state leaders, election administrators, policy experts, and allies to ensure that all eligible citizens have the freedom to vote how they choose.

At Secure Democracy USA, we believe that strengthening security in our elections so we have accurate results and improving voter access so every American can exercise their sacred right to vote are not mutually exclusive. In fact, meeting both of these important goals is how we best build more confidence and trust in our elections. That's why we are thrilled to support the committee substitute to SB39. This piece of legislation is a wonderful example of meeting these dual goals, and we applaud the leadership and vision of the sponsor for bringing this bill forward.

While there are a few minor technical changes we would recommend to clarify intent in some sections of the bill, overall this is a very strong piece of legislation with plenty to celebrate.

First, this legislation strengthens election security and transparency for voters by proposing critical best practices and guardrails around the voting process. It clarifies important chain of custody safeguards for ballots and counting equipment, proposes best-practice ballot tracking mechanisms such as barcodes, layers in transparency for the voter to see where in the process their ballot is, and establishes a cybersecurity training program for elections officials to equip them to better identify threats and vulnerabilities and shore up our protections against them. The bill also proposes security measures for the ballot paper itself, important firewalls regarding internet connectivity for tabulators, and a robust risk-limiting audit process to ensure accuracy in the elections results. The bill will also allow for important updates to how Alaska maintains their voter rolls, to better ensure accuracy and build public confidence that the state's voter rolls are current and accurate.

Secondly, this legislation critically improves the ability of Alaskan voters to ensure that their ballot will be accurately counted. The legislation would create a uniform, statewide cure process, by which elections officials can contact voters to correct common, honest mistakes on their ballot such as a missing signature. Not only does this measure ensure Alaska voters that their ballot can be counted, but it also gives elections officials another security check to identify and address any cases of actual fraud or illegal voting. To strengthen this provision, we would propose an amendment to better align the mailing

timelines for notice with the cure deadline and some minor clarifications to ensure that voters have equal protection and opportunity to cure under the law. We feel two days post-election is too short considering the 14 day cure window and the fact that timely ballots can be received as late as 10 days after election day. However, the robust cure process proposed in SB39, combined with signature matching—the most trusted form of ballot verification in the nation—is widely recognized as a best practice in election administration and the most common arrangement nationwide, including in similarly rural western states such as North Dakota, Utah, Arizona, and Montana. This is a tremendous improvement and important modernization from Alaska's current witness requirement for absentee ballots.

Finally, hand in hand with the critical security and transparency measures, this bill also proposes important modernizations to how Alaskans can access their freedom to vote. The bill modernizes Alaska's voter registration systems, improves language accessibility, creates a permanent absentee voter list (again with safeguards in place to avoid abuse) to ensure that voters who may be homebound, disabled, or otherwise unable to appear in person will receive the absentee ballots they need to participate in all elections.

In its totality, the committee substitute to SB39 is a strong piece of legislation that will bring Alaska in line with accepted best practices for security, transparency, access, and accountability in their elections systems. Most importantly, we strongly believe that this piece of legislation will help build the public's confidence in our elections. Every voter should have the ability to cast their ballot, and the confidence to know their ballot was counted, and the results that are shared when the counting is done are accurate and trustworthy. We thank Senator Shower for his leadership in bringing this bill forward, and we strongly encourage a yes vote.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Olena', with a stylized, flowing script.

Charley Olena
Senior Director of Advocacy
Secure Democracy USA