

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



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Sponsors Statement

CS for SB 39 Judiciary

Senator Mike Shower

If a society does not have confidence in how its public officials are elected, then the very foundation of our Republic is compromised. SB 39 is the product of four years of work attempting to regain the public's confidence in the sacred and unique right to choose our leadership without a shot being fired, unlike what we witness in other parts of the world. Such as when Iraqi's proudly displayed their thumbs covered in ink when they had a chance to freely vote for their leaders.

SB 39 has gone through several changes from its original inception. The latest version has been a collaborative effort built around the concept of "making it easy to vote and hard to cheat". One of the greatest challenges to election reform is the significantly opposing viewpoints across the political spectrum. One view is making it very easy to vote, which may make it easier to cheat. On the opposite spectrum if it's hard to cheat, this can pose the challenge of making it harder to vote. Polarized partisans have co-opted the issue with accusations from both sides. We believe it's time to move past this narrative and take a positive step forward.

Our office has taken the approach of looking for ways to strike a balance with people on both side of the equation. For example, this bill addresses same day voter registration, on the easier to vote wish list. Our operating principle was to ensure the voter provides sufficient proof they have been an actual resident of the district for 30 days, signs an affidavit affirming so under penalty of perjury, and votes on a question ballot. Both sides were able to reach a consensus. This metric makes it easier to vote, and still hard to cheat. We respectfully ask our colleagues to apply this policy metric when considering amendments to this measure as well as their support for the bill.

SB 39 strives to make the process open and transparent by being a national leader in embracing open-source voting, a digital concept which eliminates proprietary hardware and software, allowing open access to the public to mitigate real or imagined concerns over digitally tainted results. Open-source

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systems are never hooked up online, cell tower or wireless network, and all equipment utilizes off the shelf hardware. Let's put the ballot machine arguments to rest.

Over registration on our voter rolls have been a consistent problem for Alaska with an average of 40,000 people moving into, and 40,000 people moving out of the state, each year. Several measures in SB39 help clean up the rolls. One is requiring the state to use more data bases with better up to date information and requiring the state to educate and inform people who have moved - to unregister. Requiring a yearly report to the legislature will help us improve the accuracy of our voter rolls.

Ballot chain of custody protocols are strengthened. As well as bar code tracking for ballots to maintain a more robust chain of custody when a ballot is out of the control of the Division of Elections and provides a quick "curing" if a voter makes a technical mistake that would have previously disqualified their vote.

Digital ballot tracking through a phone or online application will increase ballot chain of custody providing a forensic digital trail.

Many measures in the bill allow easier voting opportunities but incur stiff penalties for violating those voting laws, thus making it easier to vote and harder to cheat.

Our voting laws are complex as this bill demonstrates. These are just a few examples of the effort, thought and compromise put into the bill, but the principles remain. Reasonable people can disagree, but the bi-partisan sponsors in each body carefully crafted a collaborative effort, in an attempt to show Alaskans and perhaps the country that pragmatic working solutions can be achieved. Our office has pre-conferenced the issues where possible to mitigate confusion and expedite the end of session hope to get election reform across the finish line. We welcome the public's and policy maker's discussion on the latest version of SB39 and its "companion" legislation in the House.

Thank you for hearing the bill and I look forward to answering your questions and, with your help, moving bi-partisan common sense election reform by the end of the 32nd legislative session.

Senator Mike Shower