



## HB 37 Will Enhance Election Security, Ensure Alaskans' Freedom to Vote

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Dear Chairman Shaw and esteemed members of the House State Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 37. Building on bipartisan proposals introduced last session, HB 37 would:

- **Strengthen election security** by verifying absentee voters' identity through signature matching;
- **Enhance election transparency** by improving Alaska's ballot tracking system;
- Help ensure that **every eligible Alaskan will have their ballot counted** by creating a cure process for absentee ballots; and
- Allow eligible Alaskans to **more conveniently exercise their freedom to vote** through important modernizations.

My name is Peter Skopec, and I am the Director of Advocacy for Secure Democracy USA. We are a national, nonpartisan nonprofit that works across the aisle with state leaders, election administrators, and policy experts to build greater confidence in our elections and improve voter access across the United States.

We believe that strengthening election security and guaranteeing that every eligible citizen has the freedom to exercise their right to vote are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the best way to build confidence and trust in our elections is by advancing the policies contained in HB 37 that achieve both of these objectives at the same time. We applaud Representative Schrage and members of the committee for working across the aisle to consider this well-balanced bill.

**First, HB 37 will build confidence in our elections by strengthening election security.** Under HB 37, the Division of Elections would verify absentee ballots by matching a voter's signature to the signature in their voter registration file – the most common and trusted way to verify absentee ballots nationwide.

Current law requires an absentee voter's ballot certificate to be notarized or witnessed. This process is unnecessarily burdensome – particularly for rural and senior voters – compared to other, equally effective forms of ballot verification. Most states – including many western, rural states with high absentee participation rates, such as Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, North

Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming – allow voters to return their absentee ballot by providing identifying information such as a voter’s signature, address, and/or date of birth.

Alaska is one of only 11 states that require voters to obtain a witness or notary signature before returning their ballot envelope. This requirement has become even more challenging in the wake of the United States Postal Service’s decision, in 2020, to no longer allow Postal employees to serve as witnesses. Replacing this burdensome witness/notary requirement with more effective signature matching is an excellent improvement that would make voting more accessible to Alaskans, without sacrificing election security.

**Second, HB 37 enhances election transparency through improvements to Alaska’s absentee ballot tracking system.** While Alaska already offers some level of ballot tracking, the existing system could offer voters more detailed information throughout the absentee voting process – particularly by letting them know whether their ballot was counted.

The comprehensive, free, online, mobile-friendly ballot tracking system created by HB 37 would allow voters to confirm that their absentee ballot was mailed by the Division of Elections, track its delivery to the voter, and confirm that the completed ballot was returned and counted. Fourteen states, including Utah, Texas, and Florida, require that voters be able to track their mail ballots in this way, and many other states also provide this critical level of detail to voters administratively.

As discussed below, ballot tracking would also support Alaska’s cure process, as proposed by HB 37, by helping absentee voters recognize and fix errors on their ballot envelopes.

**Third, HB 37 would help ensure that every eligible voter will have their ballot counted by creating a uniform, statewide cure process.** Cure processes allow elections officials to contact voters to correct common, honest mistakes on their absentee ballots, such as a missing signature. Not only does this measure assure Alaska voters that their ballot will be counted, but it also gives elections officials another security check to identify and address any cases of actual fraud or illegal voting.

In just the past few years, 16 states – including Texas, Louisiana, Indiana, and Kentucky – have adopted permanent or temporary cure processes. In total, 31 states across the political spectrum, including large western and rural states like Montana, Utah, and North Dakota, notify and give voters the opportunity to cure ballots with minor mistakes.

The absence of a uniform, statewide cure process contributed to unacceptably high absentee ballot rejection rates in Alaska’s elections in 2022, and has left the state vulnerable to Due Process and Equal Protection challenges under the U.S. Constitution. Combining signature verification with a cure process, as HB 37 does, is widely regarded as a best practice in election administration, and would greatly benefit election security and voter access.

**Finally, HB 37 proposes important modernizations that will allow Alaskans to more conveniently access their freedom to vote.** Among other updates, the bill expands Alaska's existing same-day voter registration system; creates an absentee voter list that allows voters who prefer to vote by mail or are unable to vote in person to apply once and then continue to receive absentee ballots for future elections without the need to re-apply; and provides postage-paid return envelopes to absentee voters.

Every eligible voter should have the freedom to cast their ballot securely and conveniently, the confidence to know their vote was counted, and the certainty that reported election results are accurate and trustworthy. HB 37 will bring Alaska's election system in line with best practices for security, transparency, access, and accountability. In doing so, we strongly believe this legislation will strengthen the public's confidence in Alaska's elections.

We thank Representative Schrage for his leadership introducing this important legislation, and Chairman Shaw and the esteemed members of the committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony. We would be happy to provide the committee with any additional information, including the implementation and effect of similar provisions in other states.

We respectfully urge you to support HB 37.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Skopec', with a horizontal line underneath.

Peter Skopec  
Director of Advocacy  
Secure Democracy USA

Secure Democracy USA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to build confidence in our elections and improve voter access across the United States. Our goal is to support local election officials and state lawmakers to make elections policy that ensures our country continues to be a beacon of democracy for the entire world.