



# **Senator Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki**

Alaska State Legislature

District P Fairbanks & Badger Road

## **Senate Bill 19 Sponsor Statement**

*"An Act relating to elections: and providing for an effective date."*

Over 360,000 Alaskans voted in the 2020 election making it the election with the greatest participation in Alaska history. Yet 173,000 Alaskans were eligible to vote or register to vote but did not. Senate Bill 19 seeks to build upon the participatory success of the 2020 election by strengthening the voter registration system, paying postage for by-mail absentee ballots, and requiring the Alaska Division of Elections to offer absentee voters the option to fix errors in their ballots. This bill facilitates participation for those legally eligible to vote and ensures the integrity of elections by updating absentee ballot verification and curing.

Currently, voters are not notified of errors in their absentee ballots until after the election is certified. Over 7,500 ballots were rejected in the 2022 special primary election, a 4.55% rejection rate. That's about 1/20 ballots. On average, some in this room's ballot was rejected.

Voters still must fill out a formal application every year. While Alaska has a permanent absentee voter list, it is authorized by regulation, not statute. The current list is reserved for those who live in very rural areas, the disabled, and persons who live in institutions that serve elders or those with a disability. Moreover, those on the list don't automatically receive an absentee ballot, just an application for a ballot.

This bill requires the state to pay return postage for by-mail absentee ballots. It requires the Division of Elections to provide an option for each absentee voter to permanently receive the absentee ballot unless that voter should not vote in a period of four years, or the absentee ballot were returned to the department as undeliverable. This bill also requires each voter to sign the ballot. That signature needs to match that voter's signature in the voter registration database using signature comparison software, and election workers comparing signatures are required to be trained in use of the software.

SB 19 also establishes a ballot tracking system and a ballot curing process. The ballot curing process requires the division to notify voters if the signature on their ballot does not match the one on their registration. This bill allows family members, caregivers, elections officials, postal workers, or volunteers from nonpartisan nonprofit organizations, like the League of Women Voters, to deliver ballots to drop off locations and establishes a clear chain of custody thereof.

Voting rights are fundamental to American Democracy, which works best when eligible voters can participate and have the freedom to choose our elected leaders. Expanding and broadening the ability for all eligible Alaskans to vote ensures that these freedoms and rights prevail. I respectfully urge your support of SB 19. Please reach out to my office with any questions.

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**In Juneau** ◦ Alaska State Capitol Room 119, Juneau, Alaska 99801  
**In Fairbanks** ◦ 1292 Sadler Way Suite 314, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701  
**Juneau** ◦ (907) 465-3466 ◦ **Fairbanks** ◦ (907) 456-7423  
**Email:** Sen.Scott.Kawasaki@akleg.gov