

From: Robert Welton <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 10:56 AM
To: Senate State Affairs
Subject: Public Comments, SB 64

**Public comments on Senate Bill 64,
Thirty-fourth Legislature, First Session, Senate State Affairs Committee, February 4, 2025**

Robert Welton
Unaffiliated
Douglas

Thank you for the opportunity to make public comments on SB 64, “the omnibus bill” of election reform measures. Overall, I feel this is a good, bipartisan bill that will both expand voter access, and also increase security, transparency and trust in elections. I have a few more specific comments to follow:

Watching the January 30, 2025 Senate State Affairs Committee meeting on Gavel to Gavel, I agree in principle with Senator Shower’s comment that the bill must balance increasing access with increasing security, transparency and trust. Senator Shower makes a good point, and I feel this bill is a good attempt at doing just that. From my reading of the bill, here is how the various provisions sort out (not listing every provision, for brevity):

Ease of Access:

- Section 1 allows registration up to election day. Getting more folks to vote strengthens democracy.
- Section 3 allows pre-registration of people aged 16-18. This can only improve engagement.
- Sections 4 and 6- allow use of electronic signatures. Moving into the digital age.
- Section 5- strengthens language requirements for ballots.
- Sections 7-11 allow for registrations, transfers and re-registrations to be accepted within 30 days of an election. These voters would not be rejected, but would need to vote an absentee/special needs/questioned ballot. This will make it easier for Alaskans to vote.
- Section 25- allows the Division to include postage paid envelopes with absentee ballots. This can only help increase voting.
- Section 26- clarifies that special needs ballots can’t be rejected due to election worker errors. This addresses a recent issue, and will keep votes from being thrown out over a technicality.
- Section 27 and 31 - removes the requirement that absentee ballots be signed in the witness of a designated official. This removes an un-necessary barrier to voting. Voters still have to attest, under penalty of the law, that they otherwise qualify.
- Section 29- mandates adding an option to absentee ballot applications, allowing voters to request absentee ballots in future elections.
- Section 35- lays out rules for using drop boxes. This will make it more convenient for folks to vote.
- Section 42 allows folks who move into a district within 30 days to vote a questioned/special needs/absentee ballot. This will improve access, while maintaining a review of these ballots to ensure they are lawfully cast.
- Section 47 asks the Division of Elections to produce a report to the Legislature on increasing early voting in rural and low income areas. I support anything that makes it easier for all Alaskans to vote.

Increasing Security, Transparency and Trust:

- Section 2 simplifies residency rules, which will speed up and improve voter registration audits.
- Section 12-15 - shortens timelines and clarifies rules for inactivating a registration. This will increase trust. These sections clarify how the Division of Elections will respond to these actions.

Section 17 and 23- clarifies and expands poll watching during elections. This will increase trust.

Section 22- specifies release of updated ranked choice counts with each election update. This will increase transparency and trust.

Section 24- Empowers the Division of Elections to adopt by regulation statistical methods to reduce risk in elections. Giving the Division every possible tool to protect our elections will help immensely.

Section 28- includes USPS tracking codes to the list of ways that delivery date on absentee ballots can be verified. This modernizes our current rules, and increases security.

Section 30- allows the count of absentee ballots to start 7 days prior to the election. This will speed up results, which should increase trust.

Section 31 tightens timelines for receiving absentee ballots. It requires absentee ballots to be received by the election date. Currently, as long as ballots are postmarked by election day, the Division has to accept ballots arriving something like 10 or 15 days after elections. This will speed up election results.

Section 32- allows the Division of Elections to establish rules for challenging a ballot. This should reduce confusion and provide clarity.

Section 34- establishes a ballot tracking system, and also establishes procedures for curing ballots. These provisions will increase security and trust.

Section 37 adds language allowing the Director to develop a cybersecurity program to defend voter registration records. This is another good idea.

Section 38 establishes disclosure requirements and penalties for using synthetic media aka "deepfakes" in elections. This is sadly the world we live in. This will tighten things up.

Section 39 liberalizes rules for election related signs on private property. This will improve freedom of expression, and also relieve the Department of Transportation of a perennial hassle each election season.

This is a large bill, with lots of things to look at. I think it's a worthy effort, that strikes a good balance between increasing access, while at the same time increasing security, transparency and trust. I support this bill.

Thanks for taking the time to hear my rather detailed comments. Thank you as well for your service to the people of Alaska.