



Feb 6, 2025

To: House State Affairs Committee
From: Emily Leak-Michie, Executive Director of the Alaska Voter Hub
Re: Support for HB-43

Dear Honorable Alaska Representatives:

The Alaska Voter Hub is a coalition of 25 Alaska-based nonprofits and community groups working together to strengthen democracy through the collective power of voting. With a diverse group of partner organizations, the Voter Hub has a broad statewide reach of tens of thousands of Alaskan voters. Through voter engagement and non-partisan education we empower Alaskans in every community to participate in elections at every level. Our work aims to address any undue barriers facing Alaskans at the ballot box creating a voting system that is fully accessible to all Alaskan voters. We seek to ensure that all eligible Alaskans — whatever their political persuasion — can exercise their right to vote and that all valid votes are counted. We believe that if all eligible Alaskans are able to exercise their right to vote, the democratic process can flourish.

We are writing to express our support for HB-43, the elections omnibus bill, that expands voting rights and voting access for Alaskan voters. The provisions outlined in this bill contain improvements to Alaska's election system that stand to increase access to voters who have historically faced undue barriers to accessing their right to vote. The remedies to these known challenges are long overdue.

The Voter Hub Policy Working Group has highlighted the following provisions as critical needed improvements to Alaska's election systems:

- **The removal of the witness signature requirement**

The witness signature requirement is an unnecessary element of absentee ballots. Given that the state does not verify signatures, this requirement is an unnecessary and outdated step that disempowers Alaskan voters. This was evident in the 2022 statewide primary election that was conducted by mail, when thousands of votes were not counted due to missing signatures, and again in the 2024 general election with over 500 ballots being rejected. Removing this

requirement would simplify the process and allow eligible voters the opportunity to more seamlessly cast their ballots by mail, and to ensure that their valid vote is counted.

- **The addition of a ballot curing process**

Allowing voters the opportunity to fix honest mistakes made when casting their ballot by mail ensures that all Alaskans have equitable access to the voting process, regardless of where they live. The 2022 vote-by-mail special primary election is evidence that the lack of a ballot curing process has disenfranchised Alaskan voters. In this election, nearly five percent of ballots were rejected and rejection rates were higher in precincts with greater percentages of minority voters. Many of these ballots were rejected because the voter identifier did not match the voter record, no identifier was provided, or because a voter did not sign the ballot. Establishing a system that gives voters an opportunity to cure — most notably a system whose timeline and mechanics works for all Alaskan voters, gives these voters the opportunity to fully exercise their right to vote.

- **Establishing same-day voter registration**

Allowing voters to register up to and on election day has shown to increase voter turnout overall and is especially beneficial to transient populations and young and low-income voters. Increasing the window of time wherein voters can register and update their voter registration creates a voting system that is more accessible and more equitable. This provision modernizes the state's systems to be aligned with 23 other states and Washington DC. While Alaska allows for same day registration when casting a ballot for presidential candidates, expanding this opportunity to include statewide elections further empowers Alaskan voters.

- **Adding prepaid postage for absentee ballots.**

Voters in Alaska should not have to pay to vote, which includes the necessity for those who vote by mail to furnish their own stamps. Additionally, the state should not risk that people never submit their ballots because they didn't get around to or couldn't buy stamps, or couldn't submit their ballots in-person at a polling location or drop box. Nineteen states and Washington, DC, have paid postage requirements for mailed ballots. Alaska should join this list. Some research suggests that changing from requiring postage to prepaid postage, and in particular the way ballots indicated the postage was not required, created confusion for some voters. The state should be careful to implement this and other changes to absentee ballot design in a way that does not disorient voters. It should also communicate changes to voters well ahead of elections in order to avoid sudden disruption of voters' routines.

Thank you to this committee for their hard work making Alaska's elections work for everyone. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

In gratitude,

Emily Leak-Michie
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