

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 11, 2025

3:15 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Ashley Carrick, Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Vice Chair  
Representative Rebecca Himschoot  
Representative Ky Holland  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Representative Kevin McCabe  
Representative Elexie Moore

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present.

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 21

"An Act relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; and relating to confidentiality of voter registration and preregistration records of minors at least 16 years of age."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 43

"An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 4

"An Act relating to write-in candidates for President and Vice-President of the United States."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 63

"An Act relating to regional educational attendance area elections; relating to terms for members of regional school boards; relating to voter residence; relating to voter

registration; relating to the inclusion of voter registration forms in permanent fund dividend applications; relating to election administration; relating to ballot counting; relating to absentee voting; relating to early voting; relating to voting by mail; relating to publication of election pamphlets; and relating to confidential information in voter registration records."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 21

SHORT TITLE: VOTER PREREGISTRATION FOR MINORS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) STORY

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	STA, JUD
02/11/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 43

SHORT TITLE: ELECTIONS, VOTING, BALLOTS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) SCHRAGE

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/17/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	STA, FIN
02/11/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 4

SHORT TITLE: PRESIDENTIAL WRITE-IN VOTES

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) SADDLER

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	STA, JUD
02/11/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 63

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL&ELECTION BDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	STA, FIN
02/11/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

HONOUR MILLER AUSTIN, Staff  
Representative Andi Story  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor, presented the sectional analysis for HB 21.

CAROL BEECHER, Director  
Division of Elections  
Office of the Lieutenant Governor  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 21, HB 43, and HB 4; presented HB 63 and responded to questions.

MICHAELA THOMPSON, Division Operations Manager  
Division of Elections  
Office of the Lieutenant Governor  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during the hearing on HB 21.

MARION CLOUGH, Member  
League of Women Voters  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 21.

AMY GALLAWAY, Retired Fairbanks Civics Teacher  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 21.

MADISON ARREOLA  
Anchorage Youth Vote  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 21.

REPRESENTATIVE CALVIN SCHRAGE  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 43 and read the sponsor statement.

ERIK GUNDERSON, Staff  
Representative Calvin Schrage  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of prime sponsor, Representative Schrage, gave a presentation outlining HB 43

THOMAS FLYNN, Assistant Attorney General  
Labor and State Affairs Section  
Civil Division (Anchorage)  
Department of Law  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during the hearing on HB 43.

MICHAEL GARVEY, Policy Director  
American Civil Liberties Union Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As an invited testifier, testified in support of HB 43.

REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER, Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HB 4

DELORES NEAL, Staff  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Saddler, prime sponsor, read the sectional analysis for HB 4

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:15:00 PM](#)

**CHAIR ASHLEY CARRICK** called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:15 p.m. Representatives Moore, Vance, Holland, Himschoot, Story, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Representative McCabe arrived as the meeting was in progress.

^#hb21

#### **HB 21-VOTER PREREGISTRATION FOR MINORS**

[3:16:00 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 21, "An Act relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; and relating to

confidentiality of voter registration and preregistration records of minors at least 16 years of age."

3:16:51 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 21. She asked everybody to think about HB 21 as a way to increase civic engagement and impart knowledge about the voting process by allowing 16-year-old Alaskans to pre-register to vote. She said that they would still need to be 18 to vote but this proposed bill would allow pre-registration. She said that voting is fundamental to a healthy democracy for both the state and country and getting the youth started is important. She said that across the nation, young people aged 16-29 typically have the lowest voter turnout of any age group. She said that many adults complain about a lack of civics education for the youth, and this results in a lack of knowledge of government and causes reduced participation in voting. She said that currently in Alaska, 90 days before the 18th birthday, youth are allowed to pre-register to vote. She said that at this time many youths are pre-occupied with graduation, post-secondary education, and work decisions. She said that finding the time to pre-register during this time can be difficult. She said that HB 21 seeks to address these concerns by allowing 16-year-olds to pre-register and allow access to the voting process.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said that at 16 years old, most youth are living at home and attending school, often taking a government class. She opined that this is an opportune time to ensure the youth have the support they need to pre-register for voting. She said that research suggests that when youth are pre-registered to vote, they are more likely to participate in future voting matters and those who vote develop a habit to keep voting. She said states like Florida, Louisiana, California, and Colorado have already implemented youth voter pre-registration and have seen an increased youth voter turnout. She said that this bill would follow federal law and automatically provide an opportunity to register youth when receiving a driver's license at the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV). She said allowing the opportunity to pre-register during this time would allow for easy access. She said the confirmation postage would be mailed out 45 days before their 18th birthday to confirm voter details. She explained the process to the committee members regarding confirming pre-registered voters.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said that this bill also would correct a flaw that currently is in statute. She said HB 21 would establish that the address and telephone numbers for anyone under 18 shall remain confidential and not be subject to public view. She said that currently, 17-year-olds who pre-register do not have this confidentiality. She said in conclusion that HB 21 would allow access and civic opportunities for the next generation to participate in democracy and this bill would bolster state participation in voting.

[3:21:57 PM](#)

HONOUR MILLER AUSTIN, Staff, Representative Andi Story, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Story, prime sponsor, presented the sectional analysis [included in the committee file] for HB 21, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Section 1:** Adds new subsection (b) to AS 15.07.040 to allow a person to preregister to vote if the person:

- Is at least 16 years of age; and
- Under 18 years of age; and
- Provides required information for voter registration already in statute, with the replacement of a voter registration declaration, supplemented with a declaration that the person will be 18 years of age or older within two years after the date of preregistration.

Also adds new subsection (c) to AS 15.07.040 which designates that the division shall register a person who has preregistered to vote under AS 15.07.040 which designates that the division shall register a person who has a preregistered to vote under AS 15.07.040 (b) 90 days before the person turns 18 years of age and forward them a registration card.

**Section 2:** Amends AS 15.07.195 to add new subsection (e) to read,

- The address and telephone number of a person under 18 years of age who registers or preregisters to vote are confidential.

[3:23:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked if there was a plan regarding outreach to 16-year-olds that would now qualify for pre-registration and have this option.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY responded that some of the invited testimonies could help address this question and that there is some education that would need to be done but there currently was no funding in the proposed bill for that.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked whether somebody who is pre-registered would receive information pertaining to elections such as pamphlets even though they wouldn't be old enough to vote.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY responded that an invited testifier could better address this question.

[3:26:09 PM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, in response to Representative Hollands question regarding pamphlets, said that currently these types of items are sent to voter households, and if anybody living in that household was eligible to vote, then material would be sent.

[3:26:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked if the proposed bill would exacerbate problems with the current and problematic voter roll.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY responded that Ms. Beecher could best answer this question.

MS. BEECHER responded that this group of pre-registered voters would not be part of the list due to the confidentiality component of the bill and would not be considered eligible voters until they turned 18.

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked if a system was in place to keep track of these voters and whether they were eligible to vote when 18.

MS. BEECHER said that the Division of Elections anticipates handling this in the same fashion as 17-year-olds when pre-registered. She said that they would be on the pre-registration list until the system recognizes that they are soon to turn 18 and after they would be sent information to confirm the voter details.

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked for confirmation that this is not part of the bill yet, this process.

MS. BEECHER responded that it is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY added that an amendment was coming to ensure that this happened.

[3:29:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE remarked that she had been advancing the work to clean up voter rolls. She understood that the Municipality of Anchorage and the Municipality of Juneau rely on the rolls from the Division of Elections. She asked how the proposed bill would impact the automatic distribution of ballots for mail-in votes.

MS. BEECHER responded that she was not entirely familiar with what the municipalities do when they send things out. She said that another testifier could better address this question.

[3:30:08 PM](#)

MICHAELA THOMPSON, Division Operations Manager, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, said that the division would only give the municipalities a list of active voters and underage voter information would not be included.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that there were ongoing concerns about Alaskans who received ballots for previous tenants who are still on the roll but not at the address. She asked what assurances can be given to ensure that this issue would not occur.

MS. THOMPSON said this question could best be answered by Ms. Beecher.

MS. BEECHER said that the way the current bill is written does not include 16-year-olds on the list that would be accessible to the municipalities.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked how much time Ms. Beecher foresees the Division of Elections needing to maintain this increase in pre-registration.

MS. BEECHER responded that the Division of Elections is in the process of redoing its voter registration system and this is a



big reason why this proposed bill has a zero fiscal note. She said if the bill passes then it would be built into the system. She said the voter roll transfer would be triggered by a birthdate.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked what happens if the pre-registered voters do not reply to information that confirms voter details.

MS. BEECHER responded that if an individual did not reply then they would not be registered for voting.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked Representative Story what the overall purpose of the bill is; she said that nothing prohibits 17-year-olds from registering in advance to vote by their 18th birthday. She said that currently the voter roll was in the process of getting cleaned up and questioned adding more names to the roll.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY responded that these youth are in a pending status. She said these names would be confidential and the bill would ensure confidentiality for 17-year-olds as well by closing a loophole. She said the whole intent of the proposed bill, much like the other states that have passed legislation, is to make younger people more aware of the voting process. She reiterated that before the 18th birthday, a lot of upcoming voting candidates are busy. She said that HB 21 seeks to strengthen democracy and that the other states that do this see an increase in younger people voting. She said that she doesn't see it as adding to the voter rolls because they are in pending status.

[3:36:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked for clarification regarding the process for fully registering a pre-registered voter. He asked whether pre-registered voters who turn 18, receive confirmation paperwork or are automatically enrolled.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY responded that a card is mailed prior to voting eligibility, and this would enroll voters. She said that if pre-registered voters moved or were not eligible then they would not be enrolled.

MS. BEECHER added that this was part of the proposed amendment and not currently in the bill. She said the process for current 17-year-olds is that they can pre-register 90 days before an election and when they do this the Division of Elections sends a

voter registration card and after completing this card, they would be placed in the voter registration system.

[3:39:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked Representative Story, given research on other states using pre-registration processes, whether there had been any issues with pre-registered voters trying to vote early and would there be a penalty.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY responded that they couldn't vote before 18 because they would not get a voter card, and they would need to be 18 to receive the card. She said that she hadn't heard of other states that had issues but could reach out.

[3:40:20 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK transitioned to invited testimony.

[3:41:06 PM](#)

MARION CLOUGH, Member, League of Women Voters, gave invited testimony in support of HB 21. She said that the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization, and its position is to encourage the maximum interest and participation in the electoral process. The group believes that HB 21 would increase civic engagement and encourage participation in the voting process. She said that pre-registration creates good voting habits by allowing a young person to be involved in civic education early and while still living at home. She said the proposed bill would also help eliminate barriers to voting and would allow young people to have a confident voice. The League of Women's Voters promotes civic education and not who or what to vote for but how to vote. She said an example of one of the nonpartisan programs supported by the League of Women Voters is the Juneau's Capitol Students, Capitol Visits. She said this is an opportunity for students to learn about various government operations and allow them to learn about the procedures associated with the legislature. Pre-registering youth at 16 can ease the process and allow them to become an active and engaged voter.

[3:43:39 PM](#)

AMY GALLAWAY, Retired Fairbanks Civics Teacher, gave an invited testimony in support of HB 21. She said allowing nonpartisan early voter registration can empower students to be more engaged

citizens by demystifying the registration process. She said it can also make the registration process more relevant for students because it then can be paired with increased school and family support. She said that for 25 years she taught the election process to high school students from all walks of life and one experience they all had in common was the confusion regarding the voting process. She said complexities in the system can be addressed by adding pre-registration processes. She said that while employed as a teacher, the school held multiple registration drives each year. She said that last year in her Alaska Studies Class, when talking about local elections, she always had assignments where students needed to go home and talk about what they were learning. She said that three students told her that they took their parents to the polls and for one student, their mother had never voted in a local election before. She said that her students got their parents to the poll. She said to imagine if a pre-registration process could engage parental voters as well. She concluded by stating that doing civics in school and having pre-registration would increase voter engagement.

[3:47:36 PM](#)

MADISON ARREOLA, Anchorage Youth Vote, gave invited testimony in support of HB 21. She said that voting is a powerful tool to determine how people want democracy to be lead. She said that democracy is a value that means something to everyone and not just adults. She said that allowing everyone access to vote is what matters. She said that voters aged 18-29 have the lowest voter turnout of any age group. She said that everyone in that age group has a right to vote and asked why this was the case. She said that allowing 16-year-olds to preregister would allow this age group to have a voice.

[3:49:50 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 21 was held over.

#

[3:50:12 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:50 p.m. to 3:51 p.m.

^#hb43

**HB 43-ELECTIONS, VOTING, BALLOTS**

[3:51:41 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 43, "An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting; and providing for an effective date."

[3:52:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CALVIN SCHRAGE, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 43 and read the sponsor statement [included in the committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill 43 seeks to ensure that every eligible Alaskan voter has the opportunity to participate in Alaska's elections in a safe, secure, and accessible manner while ensuring valid votes are not rejected due to minor, correctable errors. HB 43 accomplishes this by modernizing Alaska's elections, eliminating the witness signature requirement, creating a ballot curing process, extending early voting to 30 days before an election, and implementing same-day voter registration, among other changes.

The purpose of HB 43 is to remove barriers to the ballot box at every stage of Alaska's election process while promoting transparency and bolstering the integrity of Alaska's elections.

[3:54:23 PM](#)

ERIK GUNDERSON, Staff, Representative Calvin Schrage, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the prime sponsor, Representative Schrage, gave a presentation outlining HB 43. He stated that the goals of this legislation are to address current barriers for eligible Alaska voters and clarify the voter registration process while maintaining the integrity of the election system.

MR. GUNDERSON discussed key changes associated with HB 43. These changes include adjusting the voter registration deadline to allow registration within 30 days of an election; extend early voting from 15 to 30 days before an election; eliminate witness signature requirements; establish pre-paid postage for by-mail absentee ballots; and create a process for voters to cure deficiencies on absentee ballots.

MR. GUNDERSON stated that HB 43 would allow voters to register or update their voter registration within 30 days of an election. For voters who register within 30 days, this bill would require that they vote by question ballot, special needs, or an absentee ballot. He said this would provide the Division of Elections an opportunity to confirm their eligibility and remarked that this is already allowed by law for presidential elections. He reiterated that current law allows qualified voters to vote early at designated stations or absentee in person locations up to 15 days prior to an election. He said HB 43 would extend this period from 15 to 30 days while eliminating the term "absentee voting station" and reclassifying it under the existing category of an early voting station. He explained that HB 43 would also provide the Division of Elections with the regulatory authority to designate which stations are operated for people to vote absentee.

MR. GUNDERSON explained that current law requires that absentee ballots be signed by both the voter and a witness. He opined that this creates an additional barrier for many Alaskans, particularly rural communities and those serving overseas. Under current rules this does not provide meaningful voter protection since the Division of Elections cannot certify signatures and there have been many instances in which these signatures have been inadequate but still counted. He then provided a list of the 10 states that require witness or notary signatures on returned or absentee ballots. He mentioned that Alaska is one of only 7 states that still require a signature from a witness for mail-in ballots. Additionally, he remarked that HB 43 would propose requiring prepaid postage for absentee by-mail ballots. He then provided a list of 19 states that require pre-paid postage.

MR. GUNDERSON then proceeded to explain that HB 43 also establishes a process that allows curing ballots that may have a missing signature or other mistakes. It would also establish protocols for the Division of Elections to contact the voter, explain ballot deficiencies, and how to amend the problems. He remarked that approximately two-thirds of states require election officials to notify voters if the ballot is ineffective and give them the opportunity to cure it.

[3:59:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked about voter registration changes. He asked if voters would be able to register on election day.

MR. GUNDERSON responded that yes, registration would be allowed on the same day as the election.

4:00:01 PM

CHAIR CARRICK remarked that ballot curing would be a valuable tool for insufficient voter identification, and asked Mr. Gunderson if he could provide an example of what it might look like.

MR. GUNDERSON responded that even with the elimination of the witness signature, there are many other reasons a ballot can be thrown out. He said this can include a missing identifier, a missing signature, or even putting the date in the wrong place. He explained that HB 43 would provide channels to help address these things.

4:01:20 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked about witness signatures and what measures under HB 43 would provide for authenticating voters without a signature. She clarified that she was referring to absentee, special needs, and all by-mail voting that require a witness signature. She questioned what protections would be in place to confirm the voter if the signature requirement were removed.

MR. GUNDERSON said that there are multiple other protocols existing in statute. He directed the question to Ms. Beecher.

4:03:00 PM

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, responded that if the witness signature were removed, the only verification would be the identifiers that were provided by the voter. Currently, no signature verification process is in place with state elections.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE mentioned a data breach that affected 130,000 Alaskans that included personal identifiers that are now on the dark web. She asked whether a bad actor could utilize this information to obtain an absentee ballot and send it in while appearing as someone else.

MS. BEECHER responded that it is possible that an individual could apply for an absentee ballot if they had all the required information to apply.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE remarked that this reason is why she asked the question regarding additional securities when removing the witness signature. She asked about the registration expansion from a 15- to 30-day expansion. She said essentially this would create "a voting month," and she asked for the justification for such a change.

[4:05:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that this proposal is a response to the high demand for early voting during the last election. He remarked that lines up to two hours long were seen during the last early voting cycle and said that the proposed bill could improve voting access for Alaskans.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked what the intent was behind the provision under HB 43 that would change an absentee voting station to an early voting station.

MR. GUNDERSON responded that this component of the bill was carried forward in legislation in previous years. It would also provide the Division of Elections authority to establish early voting locations where absentee voting can take place. It would not change the existing process or protocols but rename them.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said she believes that it would make significant changes. She asked for clarification between an absentee voting location and an early voting location.

[4:08:30 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded that by statute, early voting is different from absentee in-person voting. She said the terminology can be confusing, but an important distinction is that early voting occurs only at locations where direct access to voter registration is possible. She remarked that in 2024 there were 12 early voting stations, and they were opened 15 days prior to the election. She explained that the absentee in-person voting locations is a different process and explained the process.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether the change proposed under the bill from early absentee locations to early voting locations would result in the need for access to voter registration systems.

[4:10:52 PM](#)

THOMAS FLYNN, Assistant Attorney General, Labor and State Affairs Section, Civil Division (Anchorage), Department of Law, affirmed that Ms. Beechers remarks on the differences between absentee and early voting were accurate. He explained that in practice this would not change absentee in-person voting to early voting but just extend it.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE remarked that this is something that many committee members were trying to distinguish. She remarked on voting dynamics in Homer and how it applies to this instance. She remarked that she foresees that it could create sweeping changes and have a larger fiscal note. She asked whether the intent is to change the process of the early votes versus the early absentee or to change locations as well.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE remarked that the intent was to change the time period for early voting and simplify the process, not to complicate it. He said that he wanted to work with committee members to ensure this is written correctly.

[4:14:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked what can be expected from ballot curing provisions and how it can be ensured that all Alaskans have the same ballot curing opportunities as other cities.

MS. BEECHER responded that currently there is no cure process. What this bill would do is require the Division to contact the voters and describe what the issue is with the ballot and then they would have an opportunity to provide the verifying documentation to the division. She remarked that a challenge with rural communities would be the mailing associated with ballot curing.

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE mentioned the United Postal Service (UPS) barcode tracking system and asked if this would play into the bill.

[4:16:28 PM](#)

MR. GUNDERSON responded that there has been a good discussion with the Division of Elections, and the division has flagged this as an area that could use further investigation to ensure that it is feasible.



REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE, in response, reminded committee members of thinking about the curing process. He remarked that many absentee ballots are turned in well ahead of election day which provides an opportunity to correct the ballots. He also added that while there might be some disparities with how feasible the curing process is, especially close to the election day, it is still an improvement over the current system.

[4:19:02 PM](#)

MICHAEL GARVEY, Policy Director, American Civil Liberties Union Alaska, as an invited testifier, remarked that HB 43 contains several provisions that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) support. These include eliminating the witness signature requirement and the provision to extend voting to a 30-day mark to make voting more accessible. He noted that he would like to focus on the process for creating a ballot curing system. He said that this is especially important due to a ruling in late January from the Alaska Superior Court and a lawsuit ACLU and litigation partners filed in 2022 after thousands of ballots were rejected for minor errors. He remarked that the Alaska Superior Court ruled that it was up to the legislature and not courts to direct the Division of Elections to implement a curing system. He stated that a valid curing system would help address real problems and discussed the instances of a rejected ballot. Based on the Division of Elections report, nearly 800 ballots were rejected for fixable defects. He noted that many races can be won from very tight margins. He said it is reasonable to believe that rejected ballots could increase if no curing process is established because of regulations that were adopted in 2024. Additionally, a ballot curing system is not a radical policy change and it can be done without compromising election security. Finally, ballot curing will help maintain the integrity of the election and even increase voter confidence. He relayed that ACLU asks the committee to advance HB 43 because of ballot curing and other critical provisions.

[4:22:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY mentioned recent ballot rejections in Western Alaska and asked what the cause of the rejections were and whether the proposed bill included a remedy.

MR. GUNDERSON responded that he did not have the raw numbers regarding the primary cause. He said that the witness signature requirement played a significant factor in ballot rejections.

He reaffirmed that a ballot curing system would help address this.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE added that in the most recent election there were 1,303 absentee ballots rejected and 512 of those ballots had missing witness signatures. He endorsed Mr. Gunderson's comment that ballot curing would help address the issue.

[4:24:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked Representative Schrage what the plan was to pay for the changes to the election system.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that the fiscal note is approximately \$160,000, which he said is quite modest given the context. He said that like anything put forward paying for it would be a balancing act. He said this would need to be included in the budget.

[4:25:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE cited language in Section 8 on page 4 of the proposed bill, which read as follows:

(d) A person who claims to be a registered voter, but for whom no evidence of registration in the precinct can be found, may vote only an absentee in-person, special needs, or questioned ballot. The division **may not reject the absentee in person, special needs, or questioned ballot of a qualified voter who registers within 30 days before or on the day of an election on the grounds that the voter is not on the official registration list for the election.**

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said this section corresponds to same-day voter registration. She asked what protections are in place to ensure that someone is a qualified voter on election day.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE directed the question to Ms. Beecher.

MS. BEECHER responded that if an individual comes in on election day to vote and their name is not on the register then they must vote a question ballot. Then it would go through a review process to ensure eligibility.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that the bill as written suggests that someone may vote in "absentee in-person, special needs, or questioned ballot". She asked how this would impact the verification process to ensure that they are in fact qualified voters.

MS. BEECHER responded that they would vote a questioned ballot. She said the way it would be adjudicated would be the identifiers and information they provide on the questioned ballot certification form. This is how the division would determine voting eligibility.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that this may be a question for Mr. Flynn because as this bill is written, it would not prohibit someone being able to vote as absentee or special needs. She said the standard practice is a questioned ballot she and wanted to understand how the process would be implemented and verified. She remarked that what is written will ultimately become law.

MS. BEECHER responded that the current practice of the Division of Elections and the anticipated practice, if the bill passed would be that if they are not registered to vote then they would vote a questioned ballot. She noted however, that she could be wrong and directed the question to Mr. Flynn.

[4:28:56 PM](#)

MR. FLYNN added that the Division of Elections still checks voter qualifications when they vote absentee, in-person, or special needs.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether the distinguishing difference between a questioned ballot and other ballots is that an absentee ballot and special needs ballots are verified voters, but the questioned ballots had not been verified.

MR. FLYNN confirmed that this is a distinction.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that what she is looking at is how the proposed law is written, and the division would have to honor it. She said that if an individual is allowed to register on election day and was not verified, if allowed to vote any type of ballot, she questioned why there would be a need for distinct ballots.

MS. BEECHER responded that for the Division of Elections to implement a same-day registration, it would treat the

certification on the envelope as a voter registration form. This is what would be looked at to verify information.

[4:31:55 PM](#)

MS. THOMPSON said that currently for these types of ballots, they need to fill out information and verify citizenship, age, and other information. She described the process of verifying information pertaining to voting and eligibility to cast a ballot.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that the current practice for someone who votes an absentee and special needs ballot is that the review board will look to see if they are on the master register. However, a questioned ballot does not include individuals on the master register and warrants an additional review. She asked if this was accurate.

MS. THOMPSON responded that the questioned ballot would be given to a voter not on the register for the precinct in which they are voting. She said it does not necessarily mean that they are not on a statewide voter registration form somewhere else.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that the bill as written would allow voting registration up to election day. She said that she wants to ensure that anyone who hasn't registered or has moved districts is getting a thorough review, and they may not be on the master register. She said that with the way it is written, some people could fall through the cracks. She said the bill writing doesn't coincide with the current process and raised concerns.

[4:35:00 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 43 was held over.

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[4:35:23 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:35 p.m. to 4:36 p.m.

^#hb4

**HB 4-PRESIDENTIAL WRITE-IN VOTES**

[4:36:34 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 4, "An Act relating to write-in candidates for President and Vice-President of the United States."

[4:36:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 4. He said that HB 4 is a straightforward bill related to elections, with one simple aim, to allow Alaska voters greater freedom to vote for the candidates of their choice for the highest offices of government. He said this would allow voters to vote by write-in for their preferred candidates.

[4:38:53 PM](#)

DELORES NEAL, Staff, Representative Dan Saddler, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Saddler, prime sponsor, read the sectional analysis [included in the committee file] for HB 4, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Section 1 - Page 1, lines 4-14, through page 5, lines 1-4**

Section 1 amends AS 15.15.030(7) to require that the general election ballot offers voters the option to write in candidates for president and vice president.

**Section 2 - Page 5, lines 5-31 & page 6, lines 1-2**

Section 2 amends AS 15.15.360(d)(3) to include write-in votes for president and vice president under the same rules for counting votes as write-ins for governor and lieutenant governor.

Section 2 also adds a new subsection, AS 15.15.360(d)(5) which specifies the conditions that must be met for the Division of Elections to count a write-in vote. A vote shall be counted if the oval is filled in and the names of the candidates for president and vice president are written in the space provided. At a minimum, voters must write the last name of the candidate for president for their write-in votes to count.

**Section 3 - Page 6, Lines 3-6**

Section 3 adds a new subsection (d) to AS 15.25.105 which states that a write-in candidate running for president must file a letter with the director of the Division of Elections certifying the information required by the division under AS 15.30.026(b), including the names of the candidate's electors for

the Electoral College, the name of his vice presidential candidate running mate, the candidate's Alaska mailing address, and a signature of the state campaign chair.

4:40:00 PM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER added that there is a zero fiscal note associated with the proposed bill.

4:40:15 PM

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said he was curious to why this is the way it is and asked if there were any mechanics involved with the proposed bill and how it pertains to ranked choice voting.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER replied that in the supporting documents [included in committee file] there was a sample ballot from the most recent General Election, and it would need one more line added for presidential candidates. He said it would not require anything more than a single line addition. Additionally, he asked Carol Beecher from the Division of Elections to provide rationale for why the state currently does not allow write-ins.

4:41:55 PM

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, responded that the rationale behind not including write-ins came into play in 2020. She said that Alaska was not required by law to have write-ins for presidential candidates and ranked choice voting impacted write-ins. She explained the way that write-ins worked for ranked choice voting. She said that if enough people voted for a write-in candidate, then that would be considered a viable selection for the election. Afterward the Division of Elections would need to analyze the write-ins and analyze the information. She explained the rationale for regulating the process. She said that the statutes state that the ballots need to have enough columns to allow for the rankings and certain things needed to be included in the ballot.

4:44:53 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that she appreciated a clean-cut election bill. She asked Ms. Beecher if she could speak about the requirements for a write-in.

MS. BEECHER responded that she did not have all the information available and said she could follow up. She confirmed that many people write in candidates who are not valid write-ins.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER added that his understanding of the situation right now was that for a presidential write-in vote to count, the candidate would have needed to be registered and validated.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE clarified that what she was asking is whether presidential candidates have the same write-in requirements as other candidates for Alaska's elections.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER responded that this was correct and that in a presidential election a person votes for the elector and no other candidate needs to identify the elector.

[4:47:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how many states allow presidential write-ins?

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER forwarded the question to Ms. Neal.

MS. NEAL responded that currently about 30 states allow this.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether Alaska has ever had write-ins for presidential elections.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER forwarded the question to Ms. Beecher.

MS. BEECHER said that she did not know the answer and asked if Mr. Flynn could answer this.

MR. FLYNN responded that yes, up until ranked choice voting, write-ins for president were allowed.

[4:48:55 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK after ascertaining that there were no additional questions announced that HB 4 was held over.

^#hb63

**HB 63-SCHOOL & ELECTION BDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS**

[4:49:24 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 63, "An Act relating to regional educational attendance area elections; relating to terms for members of regional school boards; relating to voter residence; relating to voter registration; relating to the inclusion of voter registration forms in permanent fund dividend applications; relating to election administration; relating to ballot counting; relating to absentee voting; relating to early voting; relating to voting by mail; relating to publication of election pamphlets; and relating to confidential information in voter registration records."

[4:49:44 PM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, presented HB 63 on behalf of the bill sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor. She said that HB 63 is the result of feedback that was received from the last election cycles. She said there are a multitude of provisions within the bill, some new ideas and some older ideas. She said that many of these provisions are house-cleaning attempts to help make operations for the Division of Elections more efficient. This includes shortening time to complete ballots and improving the election process. She stated that the Division of Elections' mission is to ensure public confidence in the electoral process by administering voter registration and elections with the highest level of professional standards. She said that the division takes this mission "very seriously" and everything is done in the division to ensure the promises in this mission. She said this bill follows this mission.

MS. BEECHER said that one of the provisions in the proposed bill is a change to the Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) elections. She said that currently these elections are held every year, and they are held in October. On an election year when there is both a Primary and General Election, REAAs are in the middle of both elections. She explained that the process of REAA elections is the same as any other election and it is "very challenging" for the Division of Elections to accommodate all these elections. She said the rationale is that if the REAA elections are moved to the odd years then it would eliminate these elections being in the middle of both primary and general elections. She said these would ease the burden on the Division of Elections and save money. She said this shift would require changing the terms of office for the current board members from 1- and 3-year terms to 4-year terms. She said that there are 19 REAA's and these are in unorganized boroughs and for the most



part Region 4. She said that multiple seats are elected each year, and they have the same challenges as other elections. She said that the Division of Elections had reached out to all the superintendents and had not heard back from them all and thus far the feedback has been a "mixed bag" regarding their feeling of the bill's proposed changes.

[4:53:05 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER said that the residency of voters is a continuing issue for the division and the public at large for understanding what constitutes residency. She said the division is aware of the concerns regarding the current voter list and the discrepancies associated with it. She said that one of the things that makes the voter list larger than it should be is the intent to return language that is currently in statute. She said HB 63 would remove the intent to return language and the intent is to reduce confusion about it and provide clarity on what constitutes residency. She said it may not be a perfect solution but an attempt to come to a concise definition of residency.

MS. BEECHER said that another provision of the bill would remove the permanent fund dividend automatic voter registration (PFDAVR). She explained that when individuals register for the PFD, they are automatically registered to vote. If they are a new person to register or if their address has changed, then a notice would be sent out regarding re-registration. She said that in 2024, less than one-third of those added to the voter list voted. Out of the 9,056 that were added, only 2,600 voted. She said that it is an expensive program because mailing the notices costs more than \$218,000. She said even though it is called an "automatic voter registration," it was not actually automatic. She said that one component of PFDAVR is that the division adds to the list of inactive voters and that just applying for a PFD is an act of "appearing to vote." She said it causes a continuation of active voting status. She demonstrated a chart to committee members that the division mailed out 76,550 notices and of those 7,984 opted out. Of those new voters who were registered, there were 9,000 but only 2,639 of them actually voted.

[4:57:14 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER said that another component of the bill is voter list maintenance. She said that the bill seeks to remove the second notice of the two that are sent out. She said this

happens annually around January. She explained that the first notice is non-forwardable and if it comes back to the Division of Elections, then, as required by statute, a forwardable notice is sent. She said that removing the requirement of the second notice would reduce some time and work for the division. She said that the proposed bill also adds two additional conditions for the notices. The first would add that those who become ineligible to receive a PFD would receive a notice. Second is if someone receives a driver's license in another state then it would trigger another notice to be sent. This would allow time to remove inactive voters from the registration list.

MS. BEECHER added that early voting was quite different from absentee in-person voting and both start 15 days before the election. She said that when there is a proposal to move these dates back, that means that other concurrent processes also need to be moved back due to timeframes pertaining to registering to vote, candidacy, and ballot printing. She explained the concurrent events that take place "behind the scenes" prior to sending out ballots. She said that early voting requires direct voter registration system access and explained the process. She said this does not happen with in-person absentee voting. She said the voter information is updated in real-time unlike the in-person absentee voting.

[5:00:08 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER said that only the early voting time would be reduced and not other ballot types. It would only reduce it for those few days when the registers for the polling places had already been printed and there was a potential for fraud. She explained that one of the methods to try to prevent this was that these votes are sequestered and go into an envelope until voter history is completed. She said eliminating the early voting for these few days would reduce early voting times but also reduce the potential for fraud and double voting. It would also provide faster results for elections.

[5:01:05 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER said that another provision of the bill is absentee votes would be required to be received by election day. She said that the division heard complaints regarding how long it took for Alaska ballots to be counted. She asked why all these ballots are coming in after the election, why it is happening and where they are coming from. She said that by statute, during the Primary Election, ballots must be received by the

tenth day after election. She said this means the division isn't done receiving ballots until 10 days after the election. She said overseas ballots can be received 15 days after an election. She said this bill would remove the requirement to receive the ballots on election day and shorten the time required to process ballots.

MS. BEECHER said the by-mail voting option in communities of 750 members or less is also a component of the bill. She said that the Division of Elections is looking for ideas and options for expanding voting options and it would not be a mandate. She said this would assist communities that have stated that they will not provide poll workers. She said the division can't afford to wait until election day to know whether poll workers will be available. She said this option will cover these contingencies. She said currently by statute; the division cannot carry out this process. She said that the division wants to leave options open for in-person voting but has alternative options available.

MS. BEECHER proceeded to comment on official election pamphlets. She explained that the division spends a lot of money and time mailing official election pamphlets and often hears back to how many are piled up in the post office and being shredded. She said that pamphlets are not cheap to produce. Most cost over \$2 each and rural area pamphlets are more than \$5 dollars. She said looking at the cost, time, and expense of printing them, the bill proposes the division to continue to produce them but only make them available online. This change would save more than \$844,000.

[5:04:55 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER commented that many voting booths are in a state of disrepair. She said that the Division of Elections is mandated by statute to have voting booths of a specific size and dimension. She said this type of voting booth is not being made anymore. The division put out a request for information (RFI) to determine if anyone could make these and at what cost but was unsuccessful. She said eliminating the restrictions would allow the division to purchase booths [outside the standard dimensions] to replace the old ones.

MS. BEECHER said that currently compensation for election board members needs to be by regulation. She stated that it puts the division behind, and boroughs were able to pay workers

considerably more and it is challenging to deal with payments for board members.

MS. BEECHER mentioned that postage-paid return envelopes are needed as well. She also said that the Division does not want to reject special needs ballots when the error is from the representative. The proposed bill would eliminate this. She discussed the requirements and said the bill would allow greater flexibility for delivering and receiving election material.

[5:07:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE commented that she heard the word democracy repeatedly. She expressed thanks for the opportunity to make comments and said voter engagement is important. She clarified that the United States is a constitutional republic and not a pure democracy.

[5:08:31 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 63 was held over.  
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[5:09:42 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:09 p.m.