

**ANSWERED ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
JOINT MEETING  
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE  
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 23, 2025  
3:17 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

SENATE STATE AFFAIRS

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Vice Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson  
Senator Robert Yundt

HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

SENATE STATE AFFAIRS

All members present.

HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS

Representative Kevin McCabe

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Senator Mike Shower  
Representative Bill Elam

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S) : OVERVIEW BY DIVISION OF ELECTIONS

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CAROL BEECHER, Director  
Division of Elections  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview from the Division of Elections.

KELLY HOWELL, Chief of Staff  
Lieutenant Governor's Office  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions.

THOMAS FLYNN, Assistant Attorney General  
Civil Division  
Department of Law  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions regarding voting laws.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:17:50 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK called the joint meeting of the Senate and House State Affairs Standing Committees to order at 3:17 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Wielechowski, Gray-Jackson, Yundt, and Chair Kawasaki. Representative members at the call to order were Representatives Vance, Moore, Holland, Himschoot, Story and Chair Carrick.

[3:19:42 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK invited House committee members to introduce themselves.

[3:20:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY stated she has been on the State Affairs committee for several years and finds the committee very important. She's been a school board member for 15 years. She emphasized her appreciation of public feedback.

[3:21:12 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE stated she is from District 28 serving for the first time on the State Affairs committee. She's looking forward to working closely with Chair Carrick.

[3:21:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND stated he is from District 9, and he's interested in the role State Affairs has in economic development. He's excited about the committee and his role in contributing to its work.

[3:22:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated she is from District 6 and comes from Homer. She has served for two terms on the State Affairs committee, she served on other committees last term but is excited to be back.

[3:22:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT stated she is from District 2, which has 500 miles of beautiful coastal miles. She's interested in the topics ahead and happy to be on the committee.

[3:23:08 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK stated she is from West Fairbanks including the University District. She's grateful to serve in this capacity and is hoping for a productive committee.

[3:24:00 PM](#)

At ease.

[3:30:21 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the Joint Senate State Affairs meeting.

[3:31:11 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN joined the meeting.

**PRESENTATION(S) : OVERVIEW BY DIVISION OF ELECTIONS**

[3:31:49 PM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Anchorage, Alaska presented an overview from the Division of Elections.

[3:32:37 PM](#)

KELLY HOWELL, Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Governor's Office Juneau, Alaska introduced herself.

[3:33:05 PM](#)

MS BEECHER moved to slide 2, and discussed the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Division of Elections Staff**

#### 33 Permanent Staff

- Appointed by the director or hired by division managers
- Required to remain neutral and sign an oath of impartiality

#### Five Regional Offices

- Region 1 -Juneau (House Districts 1 -6)
- Region 2 -Anchorage (House Districts 9 -24)
- Region 3 -Fairbanks (House Districts 31 -36)
- Region 4 -Nome (House Districts 37 -40)
- Region 5 -Wasilla (House Districts 7 -8 and 25 -30)

[3:33:50 PM](#)

MS BEECHER moved to slide 3, and shared voter registration requirements:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Voter Registration (AS 15.05.010)**

A person may vote at any election who is:

- A citizen of the United States;
- 18 years of age or older;
- A resident of the state and of the house district at least 30 days before election day; and
- Not registered to vote in another jurisdiction.

[3:34:20 PM](#)

MS BEECHER moved to slide 4-7, and said the Division is required to follow both federal and state laws She discussed the following acts and statutes:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Voter Registration and Citizenship**

National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)

- Voter registration forms may not include "any requirement for notarization or other formal authentication"
- Requires states to include voter registration as part of an application for a driver's license and driver's license renewal

Alaska Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) registration forms:

- Person may 'opt in' to be registered to vote and must affirm citizenship

PFD Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)

- Division of Elections receives a list from the PFD Division for only those applicants who marked they are a U.S. citizen
- Person is automatically registered to vote if they mark, they are a U.S. citizen
- If so marked and the application is new or the address has changed:
  - Person is notified that they will be registered if they don't opt out within 30 days

[3:36:02 PM](#)

MS BEECHER moved to slide 5, and shared automatic voter registration criteria with the PFD:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **PFD Automatic Voter Registration**

PROCESS: (AS 15.07.070(j)-(m))

- DOE will only receive information from PFD applicants who stated on their application that they are a U.S. citizen
- New applicants and those with address changes are sent a notice informing them they will be

automatically registered to vote unless they opt out within 30 days of notice

- Filing for a PFD is defined as “appearing to vote” for purposes of remaining active in the Voter Registration System

[3:36:27 PM](#)

MS BEECHER moved to slide 6, and shared how to determine residence for voting:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Residence (AS 15.05.020)**

For purposes of determining residence for voting:

- The address of a voter as it appears on the official voter registration record is presumptive evidence of the person’s voting residence
- The presumption is negated only if the voter notifies the director in writing of a change of residence

MS. BEECHER stated a post office box is not considered an address.

[3:37:10 PM](#)

MS BEECHER moved to slide 7, and spoke about the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Voter Registration List Maintenance**

AS 15.07.130

- Yearly notification to voters (51,119 mailed in 2024)
- Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) lists

MS. BEECHER stated Alaska is a member of Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), an organization that helps states maintain accurate voter registration lists and currently, 25 states are members. She said ERIC cross-checks DMV and voter

registration data to identify individuals registered in multiple states and provides this information for corrective action. She said it also uses the Social Security death index to flag deceased voters and incorporates other data sources to track voter movement. Only member states have a say in ERIC's operations.

- Duplicate voters

MS BEECHER stated duplicate voting can occur when a person submits an absentee ballot and then votes again in person. She said election officials maintain a list of duplicate votes and forward it to the Department of Law, which then decides whether to investigate further.

- Vital Statistics

MS BEECHER stated election officials receive regular reports from vital statistics on deceased voters. Staff review obituaries weekly and sometimes poll workers will notify the Division if they notice deceased individuals on voter lists. She stated family members can inform the Division of a voter's passing.

- List Maintenance Statistics
  - [www.elections.Alaska.gov/research/statistics/](http://www.elections.Alaska.gov/research/statistics/)
  - 19,857 inactive records removed in 2024

[3:40:12 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 8, and spoke about the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Methods of Voting**

#### ABSENTEE

- Must apply for an absentee ballot to vote by mail, fax, request online. Fax or online ballots must be returned by fax or mail.
- May vote absentee in person Absentee Voting Official Location (AVO)
  - Required voter to fill out envelope verifying information and goes through the review board process

MS BEECHER stated that each April, the Division contacts communities to confirm AVO participation, by sending at least three notices and making follow-up calls. She said AVOs handle ballots and voter documentation, ensuring secure returns. Communities are not listed as AVO locations if they do not respond to communications from the Division.

#### SPECIAL NEEDS

- Requires a personal representative

MS. BEECHER stated special needs ballots serve individuals unable to visit the polls due to special circumstances. She explained that a representative delivers the ballot, completes a section on the envelope, and signs it. The special needs ballots are available to anyone in need.

*Review Boards begin review of absentee and special needs ballots 7 days before Election Day*

#### EARLY

- Vote in person beginning 15 days before Election Day
- Requires verification of registration in the Voter Registration & Election Management System (VREMS)
- Review Board reviews early vote ballots that were cast after registers were printed

MS. BEECHER stated that early voting and absentee in-person voting are different. She said early voting locations connect to the voter registration system, allowing real-time verification and marking of a voter's status and absentee in-person voting requires filling out an absentee envelope, with ballots later reviewed by the absentee board. She said a few days before the election, voter registers are printed, early votes during that time are sequestered to prevent double voting. On Election Day, those not on the register list must vote with a questioned ballot.

#### ELECTION DAY

- Vote in person on Election Day
- Must be on the register or vote goes on a questioned ballot

[3:43:52 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that the witness signature requirement for absentee ballots has led to the disqualification of thousands of ballots in Alaska. Although a witness signature is required the Division does not verify witness signatures. He asked is that still the case.

[3:44:40 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER answered the Division does not verify signatures.

[3:44:47 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the Division of Elections would discard a ballot if the witness signed using a name such as "Mickey Mouse."

[3:44:54 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied, correct.

[3:44:59 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked is a ballot discarded if a poll worker, or personal representative makes an error.

[3:45:33 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied she would check whether an error by a poll worker disqualifies a ballot, as there may be a statute that protects ballots from being rejected due to mistakes made by election officials. She stated a ballot is rejected if an error is made by a personal representative.

[3:46:00 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if 38 percent of all special need ballots cast in District 40 were rejected.

MS. BEECHER said she did not know.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI noted that while the number of special needs ballots is not large, a few hundred are rejected each year due to mistakes made by personal representatives or someone assisting the voter, not the voters themselves. He requested the Division of Elections provide the committee the information.

[3:47:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked about the process for special needs ballots, focusing on situations where individuals who require assistance and accommodations are unavailable.

[3:48:06 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded when a representative requests a special needs ballot, it is provided. She replied polling places should have tools available to help visually impaired voters or an election official can assist.

[3:49:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked how election staff training is conducted to ensure proper assistance for voters with disabilities.

[3:49:36 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER acknowledged disability training is important. The Division would address issues at its annual debriefing meeting. She added staff would remind poll workers of available supplies and advise them to promptly report missing materials.

[3:50:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether poll workers receive training only once per year.

MS. BEECHER replied poll workers undergo a one-time, four-hour training session before the election season. Additionally, there is a yearly, three-day debrief meeting where the staff reviews the previous election's events, discusses areas for improvement, and addresses any issues raised during the year.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether a representative could bring the ballot to a person that is unable to travel to a polling location.

MS. BEECHER replied that a special needs ballot is obtainable at polling locations, or a representative may deliver a ballot to a person. However, that same representative must sign the ballot, or the Division of Elections will reject it.

[3:52:26 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK inquired about federal guidelines for language assistance for voters and how well Alaska complies.

[3:52:54 PM](#)

MS. Beecher responded all states, must follow federal Rule 203, which mandates language assistance based on English proficiency and population size. Currently, Alaska aids in Yupik, Tagalog, and Inupiaq. She said an ongoing federal court settlement (Toyukak case) requires specific measures for Yupik speakers in

Western Alaska. Proposed legislation aims to prevent special needs ballot rejections due to errors by representatives, which are viewed as frustrating and unnecessary.

[3:55:14 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated Alaska presents unique challenges for conducting elections due to its vast geography, diverse languages, and small villages with limited poll workers. He stated even in urban centers like Anchorage and Fairbanks, voters experienced long wait times for early voting, which seemed worse this year. He asked what caused the delays and how can the division address them.

[3:55:44 PM](#)

MS BEECHER responded the Division was unprepared for the high volume of early voters, which lead to long wait times over two hours. Early voting takes longer than regular polling due to additional verification steps, and there was inadequate space and staffing to handle the demand. She said the issue is a priority and solutions include renting larger venues and increasing staff in urban areas.

[3:57:08 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said there is significant interest in improving elections, and while there is appreciation for the governor's bill, some provisions may require debate. He said one concern is the length of time it took to count ballots. He asked what contributed to the delay and could the process of scanning ballots start earlier.

[3:58:08 PM](#)

MS BEECHER replied the heightened urgency for immediate information and results, makes the wait feel longer, even though the process has always been a 10- to 15-day period for absentee ballots to come in. She said to improve transparency, officials have started releasing the cast vote record, as results become available. Reviewing and opening ballots takes time due to required oversight by staff and review boards. She stated a proposed change in the governor's bill aims to begin reviewing ballots 10 days before the election instead of seven. Current law prohibits counting ballots before 8 p.m. on Election Day, which has been interpreted to include scanning.

[4:00:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how many absentee ballots were not counted due to arrival after the deadline.

[4:00:41 PM](#)

MS BEECHER stated she didn't know but would provide the number to the committee.

[4:01:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated a detailed timeline showing the number of ballots received on Election Day, followed by a daily breakdown of ballots received afterward, along with how many were disqualified due to date issues, would clarify the mail-in ballot process.

[4:01:35 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT mentioned the removal of 19,000 inactive voters and asked for an explanation of the criteria that determines an inactive status.

[4:01:50 PM](#)

MS BEECHER stated that under voter list maintenance rules, a person remains active if they engage in activities such as voting, signing a petition, or contacting the Division of Elections. She said if there is no activity for two general elections, the individual receives a non-forwardable mail notice asking if they wish to remain registered. She said if there is no response, a second forwardable notice is sent. She said if still unresponsive, the voter is marked as inactive. She stated they remain in inactive status for another two general elections before being removed from the voter list.

[4:03:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether the Division of Elections and the Department of Law have formulated a response to the Fifth Circuit Court ruling, which states that counting ballots after Election Day violates the law.

[4:04:12 PM](#)

THOMAS FLYNN, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Division, Department of Law, Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions. He stated he still doesn't have an answer at this time and would need to look up the decision.

[4:04:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that understanding the Department of Law and the Division's perspective on that court ruling is essential for shaping election bills on absentee ballots. She

said the goal is to avoid passing legislation that may later require changes due to a court decision.

[4:05:18 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he has heard that there are 106 percent more registered voters in Alaska than there are adult citizens. He asked if the discrepancy sounded accurate and why it exists.

[4:05:41 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded she wasn't sure of the exact percentage of registered voters compared to adult citizens of Alaska. She stated the discrepancy arises because individuals who no longer reside in Alaska, such as those intending to return, overseas voters, and military members, are still registered to vote in Alaska.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated this is a significant concern he's heard from many constituents. He said in a personal experience, he's knocked on doors where the person at the address hasn't lived there for years, but according to the Division of Elections, they've been voting in every election. He asked how voter intent is determined, and does it largely or completely determine where a person should be registered to vote.

MS. BEECHER replied that the Division of Elections wants to remove the phrase "intent to remain" from the governor's bill because it is confusing and there's no reliable way to accurately gauge someone's intent.

[4:08:03 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how voter intent is determined and does it largely or completely determine where a person should be registered to vote.

[4:08:13 PM](#)

MR. FLYNN responded that voter intent is an important factor in determining residency, but it must be accompanied by a presence component. He stated a person must have lived in a location and intend to return in cases of previous residence. For new residents, both physical presence and the intent to remain are required.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether it would be illegal for people to register to vote in a district where they purchased a house while still living in another district.

MR. FLYNN replied that it would depend on the circumstances. He opined that merely intending to live somewhere is not enough to obtain residency.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether it's a legal violation to stay registered and vote in Nunaka Valley after moving to and living in South Anchorage.

MR. FLYNN replied the answer depends on the circumstances. He explained the current law allows a person to remain legally registered at their previous residence if they intend to return.

[4:10:10 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether a person who moves to a new district, relocates all their possessions, but retains voter registration at the previous address is violating the law. He requested the Department of Law's position on this scenario and asked if it would be classified as a misdemeanor or a felony.

MR. FLYNN replied that a formal opinion would be best provided in writing but in general the situation depends on the circumstances. He added determining whether the action constitutes a felony or misdemeanor requires further analysis.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether people are breaking the law if the voter moves to a new district but continues voting in the previous district.

MR. FLYNN replied that it may seem like a simple question; the answer depends on the circumstances. Under current law, the "intent to return" provision could allow someone to remain registered at their previous address if they plan to return.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked Chair Kawasaki for a formal written opinion from Mr. Flynn.

[4:12:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that on behalf of the Attorney General the committee could draft a formal request to Mr. Flynn and would consider holding a future hearing on the issue.

[4:12:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked if there is a distinction on the master list of how many registered voters reside outside of

Alaska, including overseas. She asked if the master register included an indicator for different types of voters.

4:13:14 PM

MS. BEECHER replied that it's unclear how the voters are designated, possibly just by address, but the Division of elections can provide the information and clarify if any specific designation applies.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated it would be helpful to understand the scale of this issue, to better assess "intent to return." She stated the term "domicile" appears to be a key factor in the statute. She asked whether it plays a role in the laws regarding "intent to return."

MS. BEECHER stated she would need to look at the statute.

4:14:10 PM

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said as a candidate, he called voters still registered in his district but now living out of state or in rural Alaska. He asked can you encourage them to vote in the district where they're still registered, or would that be considered illegal.

4:15:05 PM

MR. FLYNN responded he is not comfortable determining whether candidates are committing crimes based on these facts. He suggested that this be addressed in a written response requested by the committee. He wanted to highlight Section 15.05.02.0 of the statute, particularly subsection 4, which states a person does not lose residence if they leave temporarily, with the intent to return.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether candidates are committing a crime by asking voters to vote in the district they no longer are living in.

MR. FLYNN replied he is unable to answer that on the record in the meeting. He would prefer to provide a response on behalf of the Attorney General's office in writing.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether any Alaskan candidate had been prosecuted for this type of offense.

MR. FLYNN replied he didn't have an answer.

[4:16:57 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked whether the Division of Elections had discussed adding more early voting locations statewide to increase access.

[4:17:26 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied that the ability to expand early voting locations is limited by access to the voter registration system and staffing constraints. It requires a significant number of people to run early voting stations, and finding enough staff willing to work long hours can be challenging. She stated the Division would consider early voting stations in future discussions.

[4:18:19 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 9, and said ballots are designed in-house before printing and shipping. She stated the deadline for a candidate to withdraw is September 1, and the ballot printing process begins immediately after.

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Ballots**

#### OUTGOING:

- Printed and shipped to Regional Offices
- Tracked and follow chain of custody
- Numbered and provided in packet of 25
- Logged and stored before Election Day in a secured room
- Mailed with USPS tracking to some locations

MS. BEECHER stated ballots are tracked using their serial numbers and stubs to monitor usage, including spoiled ballots. She said spoiled ballots are kept separately and retained for a set period after the election. She said regional offices mail election materials, while Anchorage delivers them directly. Rural ballots, stubs, and registers are sent to Juneau.

#### ELECTION DAY:

- Voter signs register, shows ID (AS 15.15.195)
- If name is not on register or no ID - Questioned Ballot (AS 15.15.198-215)

- No ballots? Precinct uses unmarked substitute ballots or other election materials to mark the intent of the voter (AS 15.15.140)
- Spoiled Ballots - voter destroys, places in envelope (AS 15.15.250)

POST-ELECTION:

- Ballots mailed to Juneau Director's Office
- Stored 22 months

[4:21:32 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 10;

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Ballot Receipt Timeframes**

AS 15.20.081(e) and (h)

(e)...the [absentee] ballot may not be counted unless it is received by the close of business on the **10th day** after election

(h)...an absentee ballot returned by mail from outside the U.S. or from an overseas voter...may not be counted unless the ballot is received by...the close of business on the

- (1) **10th day** following a primary election or special election
- (2) **15th day** following a general election or special election

*These deadlines have been in law for decades*

[4:22:05 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK acknowledged that ballot receipt deadlines are established in statute but noted voter frustration this year over expected result releases that did not happen. She asked if the Division publicly announced any deadlines for releasing voting results that were not met.

[4:22:52 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded the deadlines for receiving domestic ballots are the 10th and 15th days; the volume of ballots received impacts the timeline. Ballots are reviewed by election

staff and absentee boards, which is a time-consuming process that involves multiple people checking each ballot. She said after review, the ballots are opened and scanned, which can take hours, especially with large volumes. The Division made efforts to communicate the counting timelines but has learned valuable lessons and plans to improve communication in the future by hiring a publications person to better report and provide information.

4:25:23 PM

CHAIR CARRICK asked if the solution to the communication challenge is simply about improving communication or is there more to the matter, such as having enough workers to count ballots.

MS. BEECHER responded the Division is not required to report results by a specific time but aims to do so as soon as the process is complete. She suggested one potential solution could be setting a formal schedule for result releases, such as the seventh day or earlier if processing allows. She said expanding the number of workers is an option, but space constraints in the current location limit how many additional people can be accommodated.

4:27:30 PM

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there were communities that had difficulty getting poll workers.

4:27:40 PM

MS. BEECHER replied getting poll workers is always a challenge, not just in rural areas. The key difference is urban areas have a larger pool of potential replacements, making it easier to find substitutes.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said elections face challenges like long urban lines, poll worker shortages, ballot supply issues, and slow ballot verification. He asked whether Ms. Beecher agreed that implementing an all-mail election system would effectively address most issues.

MS. BEECHER replied switching to an all-mail election is a legislative decision. A proposed governor's bill would allow mail-only voting for communities with 750 or fewer residents due to challenges in recruiting poll workers. She stated that while the idea is under discussion, it ultimately depends on legislative action.

[4:29:36 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK proposed two ideas to improve election support: appointing tribal liaisons for certain communities and establishing a hotline system within regional offices to assist poll workers and precinct chairs in real-time on Election Day. She asked whether the Division has considered these options and if it is open to implementing them.

[4:31:23 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded the Division has discussed these ideas, but staffing is a challenge. Although supervisors and regional offices are available they are often busy.

[4:31:56 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 11, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Ballot Chain of Custody**

Precinct Election Boards (poll workers) - Alaska citizens appointed by each Regional Election Supervisor

- [Non-partisan] - a minimum of three members
- Each Precinct Election Board certifies that the tabulation equipment received from the Regional Counting Board shows zero results before the opening of the polls
- Verify that all security seals and chain of custody documents are completed

Boards and employees must complete chain of custody any time documents leave their physical possession

- Verify the sequentially numbered stub on every ballot and every security seal and tamper-evident seal match the receipt and ensure material transfers are signed for
- Maintain chain of custody and security logs according to the Division's records retention schedule

[4:33:08 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 12, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Election Results**

Scanner results are transmitted to Juneau DOE Office

- Secured, encrypted pipeline, encrypted package
- Air-gapped server - onsite

MS BEECHER stated that election results pass through two firewalls: the State of Alaska firewall and the Division of Elections firewall; requiring the proper encryption key for access. She said results are transferred via a secure thumb drive, and the server storing them is never online, except within the local network in the office, preventing external hacking.

Hand count results are called in to the Regional Offices

She stated hand count precincts exist in Southeast Alaska, Region 4 (Western Alaska), Region 3, and possibly some in Region 5 (Wasilla area). She said when polls close at 8 p.m., poll workers call the regional office to report results. The office uses a tally sheet while the poll worker reports vote counts—only first-choice votes are reported in the general election.

- Tallies are scanned, and filed to Juneau DOE Office election night
- Voted ballots and registers are mailed to Juneau DOE Office

[4:35:34 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether counting and reporting errors are more common in hand count precincts or those using scanners. He said there was an error in the 24th general election where Eric Haffner was initially reported to have received 64.9 percent of the vote in the Pelican, Elfin Cove precinct when he received zero votes. He asked whether the precinct used hand counting or a scanner.

[4:35:58 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied that specific error occurred in the Juneau director's office during the manual input of scanned results into the computer. She stated the tally sheet itself was

correct, but a data entry mistake often called a "fat finger error" led to the incorrect reporting. She explained that results that are called in tend to have more errors than scanned results. This is partly because poll workers, who serve every two years, must interpret tally sheet notations correctly. She said some may have only been trained the day before, making it challenging to accurately report votes.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether Ms. Beecher agreed that receiving results from hand count precincts was a major factor in election result delays. He stated that in the 2022 general election, results from six rural precincts arrived too late to be included in the final count. He asked whether the Division considered acquiring scanners for rural precincts to help ensure timely reporting of all results.

MS. BEECHER replied that the division explored and would continue to explore equipping precincts with scanners, as it is the preferred technology. She stated there are logistical challenges, particularly in Western Alaska, where limited bandwidth can make transmitting results difficult. She stated when results are called in, the Division receives the first-choice results. If the full ballot is unavailable, the division cannot scan it to conduct the ranking process. She shared her understanding that in 2022 the Division lacked the ballots needed for ranking in those locations. However, they did have the first-choice results as reported.

[4:39:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE requested that the Division of Elections provide the committees with a report detailing the number of precincts using scanner tabulators versus hand counting, along with the associated errors over the past few election cycles. She stated that given advancements in technology, options like satellite phones or devices could be included to ensure votes are counted accurately and on time. She stated that over the past six years of working with election issues, she has not seen such comprehensive data from the Division and providing it could build trust and transparency. She asked the Division when it began conducting thorough security checks, such as air gapping, to ensure voting machines have not been compromised.

[4:42:05 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied that additional security measures were implemented after the 2020 incident involving reviewed materials. She said she would need to verify the specifics of the

previously used system and would follow up with details on when current security measures were introduced.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated that in 2020 the Department of Administration Commissioner, Kelly Tshibaka, was asked to produce a report on the security of Alaska's elections. She noted the report was not made available to legislators or the public and asked if Ms. Beecher has used the report to internally strengthen elections.

[4:43:46 PM](#)

MS. HOWELL answered a report was requested and produced in 2020. It was later released to the public in a redacted form due to executive privilege and state security concerns. She said the report is now under review to determine if any redacted sections can be disclosed given the focus on election reform. She stated the Division, in coordination with the Department of Law, expects to complete this review soon. Numerous security improvements were made since then and shared with legislators. She said the division would provide a summary of these improvements to the committee.

[4:45:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated her main concern is ensuring the Division is using the findings of the report. She asked Ms. Beecher whether she was given full access to the report since becoming the Director so she could effectively carry out her duties.

[4:46:08 PM](#)

MS. HOWELL replied the report is an internal document accessible to individuals within the executive branch who have a need to know. She confirmed that Director Beecher has access to the report.

[4:46:29 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 13, and spoke about the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Election Audits and Accountability**

Hand count of a randomly selected precinct in each House District

- One precinct with at least 5 percent of the total votes cast in each of the 40 House Districts

- If there is a discrepancy of more than 1 percent in the hand-count verification, the board hand counts ALL the ballots cast in the district

MS. BEECHER stated this hand count is done during the State Review Board's review, using multiple individuals hired from the Juneau area.

#### Absentee/Questioned Review Boards

- Review absentee and questioned ballots - observers are in attendance

#### State Review Board

- Logic and Accuracy Testing (LAT) before election
- Review all ballot tallies/results from every precinct post-election

#### Division of Elections (DOE) Post-Election Debrief

#### Off-year procedures evaluation

[4:49:09 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked why the Division does not allow voters to correct simple mistakes on absentee ballots, such as transposed numbers in an identifier, when the issue is identified before Election Day.

[4:49:30 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied the Division does not have a ballot cure process because current statutes do not address or authorize one.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked why the 2024 initiative sponsors were allowed to correct their mistakes without explicit statutory authority if there is no statutory cure process for initiatives after the submission deadline.

[4:51:01 PM](#)

MR. FLYNN responded one case is currently in litigation, and the other was litigated. He referred Senator Wielechowski to the case filings. He stated that the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that state law allows for fixing certification issues on petition booklets, which differs from an absentee ballot curing process.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked when a ruling is expected in the ballot curing case, given its similarities to the initiative statute.

MR. FLYNN replied the court is expected to issue a ruling on the ballot curing case by the end of the month, as per the judge's orders.

[4:52:02 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT said slide 13 stated discrepancy of more than 1 percent in the Hand Count Verification Board requires a full recount for that district. He asked if this had occurred, and when it last happened.

[4:52:26 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded with the information she has; this has never occurred.

[4:52:41 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 14, Election Security and Voter Protection, and discussed the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Election Security and Voter Protection**

DOE Technology

- User workstations
- Voter Registration and Election Management System (VREMS)
- Ballot tabulation system
- Webserver

Methods of Maintaining Security

- SOA State Security
- Quarterly Security Training
- US Dept of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)
- U.S. Elections Assistance Commission (EAC)

[4:54:14 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER moved to slide 15, and said 2024 was her first year. She learned many lessons and ways to improve; she spoke to the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

## **Lessons learned and Improvements**

### **Lessons**

- Communications
- Mailing challenges
- Early voting
- Rural - Region 4

### **Legislation**

- Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) elections
- PFD Automatic Voter Registration
- Election administration
- Ballot counting and receipt
- Official Election Pamphlets
- Voter residence
- By-mail voting
- Postage paid return envelopes for absentee ballots

MS. BEECHER said the Division is looking to remove outdated size requirements for voting booths that are no longer made. She said the Division has tried finding compliant booths even on eBay but had no luck. She stated updating the language would enable the use of modern, available booths.

[5:00:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether communities were consulted before the Division made changes to the Regional Education Attendance Areas (REAAs) election schedule.

[5:01:14 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER responded the Division did reach out to the Department of Education but has not yet contacted the communities directly.

[5:01:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether ensuring security for poll workers and those involved in elections was a challenge in past elections.

[5:01:44 PM](#)

MS. BEECHER replied that Alaska has not faced significant issues with violent rhetoric. She said security measures have been implemented, including key cards, cameras, and protective window film. She stated that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure

Security Agency (CISA) provided recommendations for enhancing physical security, and the Division works closely with law enforcement to ensure polling places are secure.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY stated that concerns were raised about personal attacks and threats against poll workers nationwide. She asked whether including confidentiality provisions in a bill for poll worker's personal information was a good idea.

MS. BEECHER replied no. She said for voter registration, individuals can choose to keep their personal address private, but the Division has not considered additional measures for protecting addresses.

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no further questions and thanked the Division of Elections and Department of Law for the presentation.

5:06:41 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki. Adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 5:06 p.m.