

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 4, 2025

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bill Wielechowski

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 4 (RLS)

Urging the President of the United States, the United States Secretary of the Interior, the United States Board on Geographic Names, and the members of the state's delegation in Congress to maintain Denali as the official name for the tallest mountain in North America.

- MOVED CSHJR 4 (RLS) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 64

"An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 70

"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

SENATE BILL NO. 52

"An Act relating to the day on which ballots are counted in an election; relating to absentee voting; and relating to early voting."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HJR 4

SHORT TITLE: RES. TO MAINTAIN DENALI AS OFFICIAL NAME

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DIBERT

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	RLS
01/27/25	(H)	RLS RPT CS(RLS) NEW TITLE 4DP 3AM
01/27/25	(H)	DP: EDGMON, KOPP, SCHRAGE, STUTES
01/27/25	(H)	AM: VANCE, COSTELLO, TILTON
01/27/25	(H)	RLS AT 8:30 AM GRUENBERG 120
01/27/25	(H)	Moved CSHJR 4(RLS) Out of Committee
01/27/25	(H)	MINUTE(RLS)
01/29/25	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)
01/29/25	(H)	VERSION: CSHJR 4(RLS)
01/29/25	(S)	STA WAIVED PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE, RULE 23
01/30/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/30/25	(S)	Scheduled but Not Heard
01/31/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/31/25	(S)	STA
02/04/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 64

SHORT TITLE: ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(S): RULES

01/24/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25	(S)	STA, FIN
01/30/25	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/30/25	(S)	Heard & Held
01/30/25	(S)	MINUTE(STA)

02/04/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 70

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL&ELECTION BDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (S) STA, FIN
01/30/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/30/25 (S) Heard & Held
01/30/25 (S) MINUTE(STA)
02/04/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 52

SHORT TITLE: ABSENTEE BALLOTS

SPONSOR(s): HUGHES

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (S) STA, FIN
01/29/25 (S) STA WAIVED PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE, RULE
23
01/30/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
01/30/25 (S) Scheduled but Not Heard
02/04/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

SUE SHERRIF, President

League of Women Voters of Alaska (LWVAK)

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 64.

ED MARTIN, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 64.

BARBARA HANEY, representing self

North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 64.

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 64.

RITA TROMETTER, representing self

North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 64.

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 70.

RITA TROMETTER, representing self
North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 70.

ELEILIA PRESTON, Staff
Senator Shelley Hughes
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of SB 52.

SENATOR SHELLEY HUGHES, District M
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 52.

CAROL BEECHER, Director
Division of Elections
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information related to SB 52.

ANTHONY REYNOLDS, representing self
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 52.

ERICA AUS, representing self
Unalaska Dutch Harbor, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 52.

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 52.

RITA TROMETTER, representing self
North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 52.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:18 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senators Bjorkman, Gray-Jackson, Yundt and Chair Kawasaki

HJR 4-RES. TO MAINTAIN DENALI AS OFFICIAL NAME

[3:32:54 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 4(RLS) Urging the President of the United States, the United States Secretary of the Interior, the United States Board on Geographic Names, and the members of the state's delegation in Congress to maintain Denali as the official name for the tallest mountain in North America.

[3:33:34 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on HJR 4; finding none, he closed public testimony on HJR 4.

[3:34:17 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited the will of the committee.

[3:34:18 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to report CSHJR 4(RLS), work order 34-LS0339\G, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[3:34:36 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI found no objection and CSHJR 4(RLS) was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

[3:34:50 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 64-ELECTIONS

[3:35:11 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 64 "An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

[3:35:43 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 64.

[3:36:03 PM](#)

SUE SHERRIF, President, League of Women Voters of Alaska (LWVAK), Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64. She read the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

We highlight three provisions of the bill that will offer the State Division of Elections means of improving the likelihood that a citizen's vote will be counted at relatively low or no cost to the State:

1. Prepaid postage for absentee and mail-in ballots.

The fact that some ballots require more postage than the standard stamp, that fewer people today communicate by traditional mail and may not have stamps on hand, and that postal service in many areas of the state is contracted and may have limited hours of service, while in other communities there may not be local sales of postage stamps at all, means that this proposal is a low-cost way to easily erase one obstacle in the voting process.

2. Elimination of the signature requirement for absentee and mail-in ballots.

The Division of Elections should use its resources to verify voters' identities and should not rely on an often-illegible signature of a witness who is not identified in any other meaningful way on the cover envelope for mailed ballots. The requirement puts up an unnecessary barrier to some people who live by themselves or who may be out of state or country, and this requirement has in fact caused the rejection of the votes of otherwise eligible and qualified voters.

3. A ballot cure process.

Such a process would ensure that the Division of Elections looks for problems with return envelope identification information before the election and, like 24 other states and the Municipality of Anchorage, allows voters the chance to provide missing information before their votes are discarded. Currently the work of the Division of Elections to identify problems is already established but takes place after the election with no recourse

for the voters when they have been notified that their vote did not count.

These three provisions along with others in the bill will work to make voting more accessible to Alaskans who wish to vote in the elections that the Alaska Division of Elections works so diligently to ensure are safe and secure.

[3:40:00 PM](#)

ED MARTIN, representing self, Kenai, Alaska testified with concerns on SB 64. He stated that first, there's concern about election division security and transparency, particularly regarding mail-in ballots. He urged the legislature to pass a resolution urging the President to issue an executive order assigning postmasters as chain-of-custody officers for all ballots. Second, he submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request on November 2 emailed followed up questions about WPX Security and wants an answer from the Division. Third, he stated that the election pamphlet needs correcting. He said he had concerns about precinct labeling discrepancies for election reporting.

[3:44:36 PM](#)

BARBARA HANEY, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 64. She stated that first, the synthetic media section (page 22, line 8) is too broad. This section should be reconsidered or removed—it's not the Division of Elections' role and better suited for Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC). Second, the signage limit (page 25, line 22) is unfair. Political signs are capped at 32 sq. ft., while others (like business signs) can be 66 sq. ft. She stated that for fair political visibility, the size limit should match federal standards.

[3:50:25 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI mentioned that the committee had some discussion on the synthetic media section of the bill. He stated that there are other similar bills moving through the committee, and the committee would cover artificial intelligence in more depth during another meeting. He stated that the 32 sq. ft. sign limit, ties to an Alaska Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) case and current billboard law.

[3:51:50 PM](#)

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 64. He stated that the witness signature on

absentee and mail-in ballots plays a key role in verifying the voter's identity and without it, there's no other signature verification in our process. He stated that in the last election there were only 512 witness signature issues so given this low rejection rate, there's no need for a complicated cure process that adds confusion and cost.

[3:56:38 PM](#)

RITA TROMETTER, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 64. She stated that Section 38 seems to reject progress. AI, or "synthetic media," is a modern tool widely used in the 2024 general election. She said we should evolve with technology, as we do with computers. She stated that Section 39 restricts free speech by limiting campaign sign size on private property. A 32 sq. ft. sign isn't visible from a highway if it's set back for beautification laws. She said limiting signs during campaign season downplays the election's importance and may conflict with past court rulings supporting larger signs on private land.

[3:59:11 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 64 in committee.

SB 70-SCHOOL&ELECTION BDS; VOTING; ELECTIONS

[4:00:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 70 "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."

[4:00:25 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 70.

[4:00:56 PM](#)

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 70. He stated that he's in support of:

- REAA election change of moving the election year to the odd years.

- change in the registration process
- requiring absentee ballots by election day.

He stated that he is concerned with cutting 5 days of early voting. He suggested verifying no duplicate voting and processing those votes by Friday after the election. He stated that he opposes:

- permanent absentee ballot system
- same-day voter registration

[4:09:10 PM](#)

RITA TROMETTER, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 70. She opined that a 4-year school board term is too long and 3 years is a perfect timeframe. She stated that PFD applicants should only be added to voter rolls if they check the box to register. She said that a real recount involves a hand count and mass mail in ballots are wasteful and prone to abuse.

[4:13:51 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 70 in committee.

[4:14:42 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 52-ABSENTEE BALLOTS

[4:15:30 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 52 "An Act relating to the day on which ballots are counted in an election; relating to absentee voting; and relating to early voting."

[4:15:48 PM](#)

ELEILIA PRESTON, Staff, Senator Shelley Hughes, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented an overview for SB 52. She read slides 2-6.

[4:16:17 PM](#)

MS. PRESTON moved to slide 2:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Overview

Purpose of the legislation: To require all ballots be received and counted on election day which will bolster voter confidence, election integrity, and the perceived credibility of Alaska nationally.

[4:16:30 PM](#)

MS PRESTON moved to slide 3:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**What Does it Do?
A Shift Toward Efficiency**

Ballot Tabulation Deadline

All ballots must be counted and tabulated by 11:59 p.m. on election night.

Ballot Security

Ballots that are delayed for delivery because of weather or mechanical issues must be monitored by a video recording device.

Early Voting Adjustments

Early voting timeline will be revised for early voting to accommodate the new counting deadline.

[4:17:02 PM](#)

MS PRESTON moved to slide 4:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Handling Ballots Under Adverse Conditions
Ensuring Election Integrity in Challenging Scenarios**

Transparent Storage

Ballots delayed by weather or mechanical issues must be stored in transparent containers.

Continuous Video Monitoring

Stored ballots are monitored using video recording for added security.

First-Day Delivery Post-Resolution

Delayed ballots must be delivered at the earliest opportunity.

[4:17:57 PM](#)

MS. PRESTON moved to slide 5:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Current Challenges in Ballot Handling

Delayed Vote Counts: Existing laws allow delays in ballot counting, reducing public trust in results.

Adverse Weather Impact: Alaska's remote areas and extreme weather often hinder timely ballot transport.

Transparency Concerns: Inconsistent storage and transport methods lead to doubts about ballot security.

[4:18:33 PM](#)

MS. PRESTON moved to slide 6:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Journey of the Ballot

Absentee Ballots

Civilian Ballots -- Day 10 Counted on Day 7,10,&15

Overseas Ballots -- Day 15 Counted on Day 7,10,&15

Early Vote Ballots

Early Ballots -- Same Day (except final days)

Question Ballots

Ongoing

Certification Ballots

Election results are certified on Day 16 -- Day 22

Side Note: Early voters that cast a ballot after the register is printed function as absentee ballots.

[4:19:02 PM](#)

SENATOR SHELLEY HUGHES, District M, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, as sponsor she continued the introduction of SB 52. She stated that in current statutes there is nothing about a deadline for counting or reporting ballots. After a discussion with Ms. Beecher, it was determined that the 11:59 [pm] deadline was unrealistic due to the review board needing time to address the arrival of absentee and questionable ballots. She said the

goal of SB 52 is to report results sooner. She stated it is possible and with enough staff most results could be in by election night or early morning, excluding final-day absentee and questioned ballots. The goal is to boost voter confidence, national credibility, and avoid delays that affect federal delegate seniority.

[4:23:02 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES recommended the review board needs to get started earlier to work on the absentee ballots.

[4:23:38 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked when the board begins the ballot review process and whether it is governed by statute or regulation.

[4:23:59 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES answered currently the board start 7 days in advance, the governors bill suggest 10 days, and Ms Beecher recommends 12 days in advance.

[4:24:15 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked what a reasonable deadline is for completing ballot counting.

[4:24:36 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES answered Ms. Beecher was hesitant to have a short deadline of 48 hours. She said Ms. Beecher wouldn't be as concerned about a short deadline if they could hire more staff. She suggested leaving off a deadline.

[4:25:29 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI commented on how election day works in Fairbanks. He stated 50 people, including volunteers, are staffed during the election period. Staffing returns to 2 people after election day. He asked whether the timeline is legitimate or is there an existing structure that can absorb them.

[4:26:11 PM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, Director, Division of Elections, Anchorage, Alaska, provided information related to SB 52. She stated she is hesitant to set a firm deadline because many variables affect when ballots are received. She said the absentee ballot process has three steps: verification, sorting, and board review. The division checks the certification on the envelope and sorts ballots by precinct and date. Challenges are addressed at the time the absentee ballot review takes place with the division director required to be onsite. Next, ballots are opened and

prepared for scanning. She stated that if the Division of Elections started reviewing 10 days before the election and required ballots by election day, the division could do most of the work ahead of time—leaving only election day ballots and question ballots to be handled afterward, unlike now where processing continues up to 15 days post-election.

4:29:04 PM

SENATOR HUGHES stated her belief that SB 52 is a good concept for Alaska. She stated that after speaking with Ms. Beecher, she recommends striking from Section Eight, page 4, the proposed increase in overseas outgoing mailing days from 45 to 60 days and domestic outgoing mailing from 30 to 45. She also suggested keeping ballot return transportation methods flexible by allowing alternatives to air transport.

4:30:40 PM

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 52.

4:30:57 PM

ANTHONY REYNOLDS, representing self, Dillingham, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 52. He expressed concern that SB 52 sets an Election Day deadline for absentee ballots, which could harm rural Alaska. As a logistics worker, he noted frequent delays from weather, mail, staffing, and plane issues and could prevent ballots from arriving on time. In Dillingham, for example, some ballots weren't counted due to missing postmarks, a result of post office errors. He urged improving rural mail logistics before changing the law and called for some deadline flexibility to ensure fair counting.

4:34:40 PM

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked if Dillingham has early voting stations.

4:35:00 PM

MR. REYNOLDS answered Dillingham does but villages outside of Dillingham do not. He opined that SB 52 would be detrimental to people living in villages since they often do not have early election voting sites and sometimes only have an election official available a few hours a day for in person voting.

4:36:48 PM

ERICA AUS, representing self, Unalaska Dutch Harbor, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 52. She stated that the bill would impact rural Alaska due to frequent mail delays and plane issues that can backlog of mail for weeks. She stated that rural areas

also face staffing shortages, making a strict 11:59 p.m. deadline unrealistic. SB 52 shortens early voting, which hurts residents who travel or work long shifts.

[4:39:19 PM](#)

RANDY RUEDRICH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 52. He stated SB 52 could be incorporated into SB 70.

[4:40:14 PM](#)

RITA TROMETTER, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 52. She said she supports efforts to improve elections but believes results should not take 10-15 days after Election Day and supports requiring photo ID to vote. She stated it would be best if absentee ballots are received, not just postmarked, by Election Day. Rural voters must be better informed to vote early. She criticized re-scanning ballots as inaccurate and called for partial hand counts to verify machine results.

[4:44:17 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted her experience living in rural Alaska and acknowledged mail delays but stated mail service is faster now. She agreed with the previous testifier that Alaskans would need to plan ahead.

[4:45:16 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 52 in committee.

[4:45:24 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI kept public testimony open on SB 52.

[4:47:14 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:47 p.m.