

[Vote-by-mail is the safe choice for 2020](#)

By [Paul Burns](#) on May 06, 2020 in [Elections and Government Reform](#), [News and Updates](#)



No voter in Vermont should have to choose between staying safe and exercising their right to vote this year.

But there is no question that during this pandemic, in-person voting can be dangerous for voters and poll workers alike. This is especially true for the November general election, when voter participation rates are expected to be very high.

Secretary of State Jim Condos and Governor Phil Scott have the joint authority to protect our election by requiring the implementation of a vote-by-mail system this year. Secretary Condos and his staff have done the exhaustive work in recent weeks to figure out how voting by mail could work best in Vermont. The question now is, will Gov. Scott, who has been so focused on safeguarding his fellow Vermonters, do the right thing here?

More than a dozen businesses and nonprofit organizations [have joined forces](#) to support a universal vote-by-mail system for 2020 so that every registered voter in Vermont receives a ballot through the mail. Over a thousand more Vermonters have signed on to our petition calling for 1) A universal vote-by-mail system this year, 2) Safe, in-person voting options to remain available for those who need them, and 3) A broad public education and outreach campaign to maximize successful participation in the mail-in program.

It's clear that Vermonters are ready for vote-by-mail, and they're not alone. [Recent polling by Reuters/Ipsos](#) shows that a large majority of Americans (72 percent) support a requirement for mail-in ballots this year.

And why not? [New research published this week](#) looks at data from Colorado, where vote-by-mail has been in place since 2013. It shows that by making it easier to vote, everyone benefits. Voting rates increased nine percentage points overall due to mail-in voting. Participation among every age, race, wealth group, occupation, and level of education went up. And the benefits were greatest for those who have historically faced higher barriers to voting.

The idea of voting by mail is not new in Vermont. In fact, thousands of voters have been casting their absentee ballots from home for years without difficulty. In a typical general election here, about 30 percent of voters use an absentee ballot or vote early.

But in order to make the upcoming election as safe as possible, we need tens of thousands more to vote-by-mail. Vermont's goal should be to have the highest voter turnout in the country this November, and VPIRG believes that we should aim to have 90 percent of those voting cast their ballot from home.

Having more people participate in the election while keeping themselves and our dedicated poll workers safe seems like an easy choice. But not everyone is onboard. President [Trump has worried](#) that, "if you ever agreed to it [mail-in voting] you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again."

Putting aside the fact that he's elevated partisan concerns over public health, the truth is there is no merit to his fears. Plenty of independent analysis shows that no one political party is benefited by vote-by-mail. All voters benefit, regardless of their party affiliation.

In fact, Gov. Scott – a Republican – first won the governorship in 2016, the election with the highest absentee voting rate in Vermont history.

The president and some of his followers have also [made false claims](#) about the risk of fraud in vote-by-mail systems. But the actual rate of fraud associated with voting by mail is "[infinitesimally small](#)" according to analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice.

As Secretary Condos noted recently on Vermont Public Radio, "[widespread voter fraud is just nonexistent](#)."

A [2018 case of absentee voter fraud](#) on behalf of a North Carolina Republican congressional candidate also demonstrates that orchestrated efforts to try to corrupt an election are bound to be detected. In that case, hundreds of absentee ballots were requested, collected, altered or destroyed, all in an attempt to elect the Republican candidate in a close election. But the fraud was discovered and those responsible were prosecuted.

So, we have a way to make our election safe and secure, even in the midst of this pandemic. Voting by mail is not new to Vermonters, and mailing a ballot to every registered voter is a great way to increase voter participation across the board. There is no excuse for failing to adopt vote-by-mail in Vermont this year.