



April 29, 2021

Vermont House of Representatives
 155 State Street
 Montpelier VT, 05602

Dear Representative,

As organizations and businesses who share a belief that our democracy works best when everyone participates, we write today in support in S.15, legislation that would make permanent the policy of mailing a general election ballot to all active, registered voters in Vermont. As you know, this policy was implemented as a one-time emergency measure as the pandemic took hold last year.

There can be no doubt that the policy was a huge success in 2020. Not only did it help to keep voters and election workers safe, but it contributed to the greatest election turnout of all time in Vermont, shattering of the previous record by nearly 45,000 votes. Participation was up in all areas of the state as three out of every four votes were cast early, mostly by mail. Furthermore, voting from home was found to be convenient, secure, and overwhelmingly popular.

A statewide poll conducted in February by the independent firm Lincoln Park Strategies found that 68 percent of Vermont voters want to make the mailed ballots policy permanent, while just 29 percent oppose it. In addition, more than 90 percent of Vermonters believe it's important to make voting as easy as possible.

We recognize that making voting easier is not a priority everywhere. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, some 361 bills aimed at making it harder to vote were introduced in at least 47 states in just the first three months of this year. One notorious new law adopted in Georgia even makes it a crime to give food and water to a voter standing in line at the polls.

Vermont has the opportunity to chart a very different course by becoming one of the most inclusive and voter-friendly states in the nation. Now, more than ever, it is critical that Vermont stand up for democracy, and not retreat from policies that maximize participation. That's why we are calling for universally mailed ballots to be made a permanent feature of Vermont elections going forward.

If enacted, S.15 would ensure that every active, registered voter automatically receives a ballot in the mail for general elections and would minimize defective ballots by including a curing process too. This curing process would allow voters to fix (a.k.a. "cure") small mistakes so that otherwise-valid ballots could be counted. In the 2020 general election, with no curing process in place, nearly 1,500 voters were disenfranchised when their ballots were found to be defective.

The bill also contains important provisions that will increase access among groups who have historically been left out of the democratic process. By January 2022, the Secretary of State will consult with municipalities and interested stakeholders on the best practices for increasing language access to voting for non-English-speaking Vermonters. By January 2023, the Secretary of State must submit a voting access report, identifying ways in which mailed ballots could be used in municipal and primary elections, and the potential benefits of universally mailed ballots with historically disenfranchised groups.

Our organizations and businesses have members and customers around the state, and we stand ready to assist in getting the word out and educating citizens about all their voting options – whether in-person on Election Day or as an early voter completing a ballot at home and dropping it in the mail or in a convenient drop box.

We thank you for considering this letter and we urge you to support S.15 to make voting in Vermont easy, safe, and secure.

Sincerely,

Paul Burns
Executive Director
VPIRG

Greg Marchildon
State Director
AARP Vermont

Falko Schilling
Advocacy Director
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Matthew McCarthy
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Mark Hughes
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