



January 28th, 2021

Testimony of Amber McReynolds in Support of Election Reform In Vermont:

1. I am providing this testimony both in my personal capacity - as an expert in the field of election administration - and currently as the Chief Executive Officer for the National Vote At Home Coalition, a nonprofit nonpartisan organization which is focused on improving the voting experience for voters across the country and implementing convenient voting options to include effective ballot delivery systems (commonly known as ballots by mail) along with in-person voting options.
2. I was qualified as an expert witness in the field of election administration and security before the U.S. House of Representatives, testifying before the House Administration Committee and the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection and Innovation.
3. Until August 15, 2018, I was the Elections Director for the City and County of Denver, Colorado. I administered elections in Denver for 13 years and have worked in public policy and administration for over 16 years. I served as the Director of Elections from 2011 to 2018, Deputy Director of Elections from 2008 to 2011, and Operations Manager/Coordinator from 2005-2008. Denver has approximately 500,000 registered voters and conducts 2-4 elections each year. The elections include municipal general and municipal run-off, school board, special district, primary, general, presidential. The State of Colorado conducts all federal and state elections by mail ballot.
4. My relevant educational and professional background is as follows:

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- a. Masters of Science – Comparative Politics, London School of Economics & Political Science, 2002
- b. Bachelor of Arts – Political Science and Speech Communications, University of Illinois, 2001

Professional Certifications:

- a. Certified Elections/Registration Administrator (CERA), Election Center (2010 – Present)
 - b. Certified Colorado Election Official (2007 – Present)
5. In my role as the Director of Elections in Denver, I focused on continual process improvement which includes implementing innovative solutions to improve the voter's experience. During my tenure, the Denver Elections Division earned national awards from the Election Center and the National Association of Counties for Ballot TRACE (a first-in-the-nation ballot tracking, reporting, and communication engine), iAPP (iPad Accessibility Pilot Project), and eSign (a first-in-the-nation Digital Petition and Voter Registration Drive Application). Denver has also been recognized by the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies and received International Electoral Awards for Ballot TRACE and eSign. In addition, the Denver Elections Division has released other innovative solutions including the Denver Votes mobile application, enhanced contextual and behavioral marketing strategies to encourage civic engagement, interactive customer service platforms and implemented a new voting system in 2015.

Introduction:

Thank you Madam Chair and committee members for having me back to speak to you. It was my pleasure to provide testimony to this body last year and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you again. I want to start by thanking

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and congratulating you on the success of your 2020 elections. Vermont stepped up to the incredible challenges that 2020 presented voters with more options to have their voices heard than less, and we are grateful for the leadership of the Secretary Condos and the Vermont Legislature. Because the measures adopted last year were temporary, I am here to offer the support of the National Vote at Home Coalition as the legislature considers future changes. We are a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to making sure every American can vote in secure, safe, accessible, and equitable elections by expanding vote-at-home systems.

The recommendations below are immediate and cost effective ways to strengthen the voting process, to ensure efficiencies and cost-savings for local and state government, and to ensure Vermont's democracy is as secure, accessible and functioning for immediate elections and for the generations to come.

MAILING BALLOTS TO ALL ELIGIBLE VOTERS

Transitioning to sending out ballots to all voters permanently will give voters even greater access to the ballot and could make 2020's increases in turnout the new normal. We believe fundamentally that the more options a voter has to cast a ballot, the more engaged the electorate will be and the healthier our democracy will be. There are also numerous advantages to local clerks including a reduction in administrative burden and many opportunities for cost savings.

BALLOT RETURN OPTIONS

Prepaid postage, another innovation Vermont implemented during the pandemic, is yet another voter-centric solution. By making drop boxes a permanent option, the state can reduce the cost of prepaid postage while maintaining more options for voters. Allowing voters to drop off their mail

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ballots at any in person voting locations in their town is another low-cost way to give voters even greater options.

CURE PROCESS

By creating a cure process to correct signature or ID deficiencies, Vermont can reduce its overall ballot rejection rate and create more confidence in the election process. Investing in a Text2Cure system that allows voters to cure their ballots from their phones can reduce the workload on clerks while increasing voter convenience. Additionally, the State should re-examine its standards for what it considers a deficient ballot. For example, if a voter fails to return their mail ballot for the primary, the mail ballot they submit in the general will be considered deficient.

PREPROCESSING OF BALLOTS

We applaud Vermont for giving clerks the option to preprocess ballots 30 days before the election in 2020 and strongly recommend that this allowance be codified into the law. Clerks used this flexibility in the 2020 general election, and were able to make sure over 98% of ballots were counted by 9am the day after the election.

INCREASED IN-PERSON OPTIONS AND VOTE CENTERS

Again, we applaud the Secretary of State and the intrepid clerks who worked creatively and with their communities to implement options like curbside voting that further increased access to voters who needed extra services. We encourage the legislature to consider these kinds of innovative solutions to ensure that all voters are heard. Furthermore, we recommend that the state considers full service vote centers as an option for future consideration to ensure that every community has access to the essential voter services that clerks provide.



RISK LIMITING AUDITS

The security of our elections systems is paramount and one of the best ways to demonstrate and verify the security of processes is by implementing risk limiting audits. These audits are statistically sound and provide the public with the assurance that election results are being certified correctly. They represent the highest level of security and transparency and we highly recommend that Vermont implements them along with any new elections legislation.

ESSENTIAL TECH UPGRADES

The technological innovations in the elections ecosystem have come a long way in the past few years. We encourage the legislature and Secretary of State to consider options that will provide better service to voters, but also to plan for the future voting patterns that might look very different from those in the past. We encourage investments in new technologies such as electronic poll books that can interface live with the statewide voter registration system and faster processing equipment that will keep up with the growth in mail ballots. Planning for and purchasing the right equipment for the system you are building can create dramatically improved voter experiences, but is also an opportunity to see dramatic cost savings. We also encourage Vermont to continue to improve and enhance automated data updates using systems like the National Change of Address database and other government systems to ensure ballots are mailed to current addresses.

Rationale for Supporting a Permanent Transition to a Vote By Mail System

Moving to permanent mail voting system has my full support, and I recommend it receive yours for the following reasons:

1. It is good for voters and it is voter-centric
2. It is good for elections officials

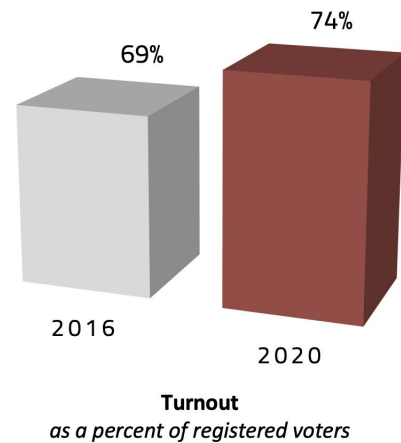
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3. It is good for democracy

Good for Voters

2020 was a difficult year for everyone. But one thing that became less difficult was voting in Vermont. For the presidential election voters did not need to remember to apply for a mailed-out ballot for every election, wait in line, or take time off from work or other obligations to go to the polling place during a limited period of time on a given day. It's little wonder that utilizing a Vote at Home model, Vermont saw a 5 point increase in turnout in 2020.

Mail Voting Lead to Turnout Jumps in Vermont



Full "vote at home" provides voters not only with convenience, but also serves as an essential reminder. The arrival of their ballot reminds voters that there is an election a few weeks out and encourages them to pay attention and participate. This is particularly important in local elections, special elections and primaries, where voter turnout is often a factor of 2x-4x lower than in a general election.

Good for Elections Officials

Today in Vermont, elections officials and administrators must process absentee ballots while still providing the full infrastructure for in-person polling places voting on Election Day. That duplication of effort wastes vital resources that could be directed to other requirements. Moving to a full Vote at Home system will help simplify and streamline their work, saving money and personnel. Certainly, some in-person staffed access will need to remain in place and

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secure ballot drop boxes would need to be emptied regularly. But the resources for those will be modest compared to still supporting a full polling place model.

At the same time, the use of 100% mailed-out ballot voting has been proven to be highly secure, especially with an intelligent barcode system Vermont already has. With the issues surrounding maintaining the voters' mail address well-executed, the system will be both fair and verifiable.

Good for Democracy

Anything that reduces friction in the process of elections tends to increase voter engagement and turnout. Allowing all voters in Vermont to vote on their schedule, in the privacy of their home, and spend as much time as they wish researching their choices, reduces friction while increasing turnout. We support Vermont's plan that includes voter-centric reforms that will continue to make the process fair, accessible, secure, transparent, equitable, and reliable. The election system must balance all of these values because one is not more important than the other. This is exactly why election policy is so delicate and challenging and we are happy to see Vermont moving to empower voters with more options.