

**Decide Alaska's Future.**

**VOTE ✓**

**“The Division of Elections is committed to finding ways to better serve Alaska voters as we move into the 2018 election season.”**

- Josie Bahnke, State Elections Director



### *A Message from the Director*

To say the first half of 2018 has been a busy one would be an understatement and it's only the tip of the iceberg! Our Division of Elections team started 2018 with enthusiasm and we have been steadily preparing for this year's statewide election cycle. We continue to implement the 2016 Permanent Fund Dividend Automatic Voter Registration (PFDAVR) ballot initiative. We are developing and producing a comprehensive training program for election workers. We testified before the Alaska Legislature on our aggressive election security measures that have garnered praise from cybersecurity experts. We are excited about collaboration efforts the division has had with Alaska Native language translators, the Legislature, academia, election administrators, Alaskan artists and media outlets. We look forward to engaging with Alaska voters in a meaningful way this year while making sure our elections are conducted with integrity and Alaskans are confident when expressing their voices through the act of voting. – Josie Bahnke, Director

### *2018 Highlights*

The Election Policy Work Group (EPWG) held its first meeting of the year on January 30. The group reviewed guiding principles and the need for strong voter outreach. David Becker from The Center for Election Innovation & Research explained that voter turnout is just one aspect of success, and states should focus on more closely related metrics such as voter satisfaction and efficiency. The group agreed increased outreach for replacing the state's aging ballot tabulation equipment should be a priority in 2018. During the meeting, the EPWG also reviewed draft legislation to give Alaskans the option of opting out of Permanent Fund Dividend Automatic Voter Registration when they apply for their dividend.

### *Permanent Fund Dividend Automatic Voter Registration*

The implementation costs for 2017 and 2018 PFDAVR were approximately \$675,000 with FY 2018 general funds. The cost includes a contract with PCC Technologies to build a new software system to hold and track individuals during the 30 day opt-out process; a program to import the records into the voter registration database; opt-out mailers to new voters and voters who updated their registration; and, temporary staff to manually process the PFD voter registrations.

The division mailed an estimated 141,144 PFDAVR opt-out notices to Alaskans. Notices went to Alaskans either who had newly registered to vote or who updated their residential addresses. The notices are a requirement of implementing the ballot measure approved by Alaska voters in November 2016. Alaskans who do not return the notice or notify the DOE of their intent to opt-out of voter registration will be processed into the system.

DOE testified in legislative committee hearings in favor of a change to law aimed at making the process more streamlined and cost-efficient by allowing PFD applicants to opt-out online rather than sending mailers to each applicant. The change could save the state an estimated \$210,000 a year. The bills (both in the Senate and House) failed to make it out of committees before session adjournment.

### *Kickoff Meeting*

In February, the division held its 2018 election preparation meeting with our management team. The focus was on ensuring each of Alaska's 441 precincts are adequately staffed with trained election workers, ballots, supplies and functioning voting equipment. In addition to the precinct polling places, there are more than 100 absentee and early voting locations throughout the state. Meeting topics included innovative worker training plans with improved language assistance components, the state's ballot tabulation system, and a variety of election management-related issues.

### *Equipment Replacement Funding*

On March 23, DOE received good news from the federal Elections Assistance Commission. Alaska will receive \$3 million in Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds. The funding is intended for modernizing elections systems and enhancing cyber security measures as states see fit. Alaska's DOE has been working to modernize and improve the state's aging ballot delivery system. DOE is currently in process of submitting final paperwork to receive the HAVA funding. Any decisions about utilization of the money will be carefully considered prior to any purchases.

### *Language Assistance*

Also in March, DOE hosted its first ever Language Summit at the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage. The summit focused on learning ways to enhance language assistance for Alaska voters and planning for future elections. About forty engaged Alaskans participated and shared ideas, thoughts and challenges facing the state. DOE communicated its process of providing translations for voters who may or may not speak English. The translation process is not easy and there is a need for more fluent speakers. DOE held a debrief meeting, in which staff members agreed to host the Summit next year.



Elections welcome song performed by Marcella Asicksik and Theo Bayou for 2018 Language Summit at the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

### *Bethel Focus Groups*

In April, DOE's language assistance team went to Bethel to conduct three focus groups to see what Southwest Alaskans think about different voting options. Participants were asked if they wanted to keep the voting method the same, switch to all by mail, a hybrid system or another alternative. DOE received great feedback from those who attended -- from young people to elders who have seen the democratic process run for many years.

Most of the adult voters preferred a hybrid scenario where they could vote by mail 2 to 3 weeks before the election or could go to a polling place on Election Day. This was offered as an alternative to keeping a Vote Center open for 2 to 3 weeks. Many explained a desire to retain the social aspect and civic focus of going to the polls on Election Day while still providing the option of voting by mail, especially for those who cannot easily vote in person on a specific day.



Katie Roehl listens to possible alternative voting methods during April Bethel Focus Group session.

Participants were also wary of the cost and skeptical of the logistics of staffing a Vote Center in every community for 2 to 3 weeks. They suggested using the Department of Motor Vehicle offices in larger cities and MOUs with tribal offices in villages. The second most popular method was keeping voting the way it is now. Voting only all by mail was the least popular option. Some focus group members like the simplicity of voting by mail and its similarity to tribal ballots delivered by mail, which enjoy a high response rate. But nearly all of them expressed concern about relying completely on rural mail delivery. They also noted that even getting to the post office and buying stamps can be a barrier in rural Alaska, where virtually all households get mail using a post office box rather than delivered to their homes. Privacy and security concerns were also raised about mailed ballots. Among high school students, keeping the status quo was the top choice by a wide margin.

### *Election Training Video Production*

DOE staff in Juneau participated in the creation of an election worker training video produced by KTOO TV in April. Elements of each video are designed to take workers through the step-by-step process of setting up a polling place, from how to register voters to what happens as voters complete the voting process. An added component in 2018 to the training DVD is a specific language assistance section led by Elections Language Assistant Program Coordinator Jim Chaliak and Election Clerk Zoia

Kernak. Fluent in Yupik, the two demonstrated how voters can obtain language assistance if necessary when voting. Anyone interested in viewing the final product can access the videos on the [Procedures for Language Assistance](#) section of the division's website.



Zoia Kernak, Jim Chaliak, Brian Jackson and Mikko Wilson discuss their scene for language assistance training in Yup'ik at KTOO studio.

### *Election Cyber Security*

Election security, which has gained heavy public interest with respect to the 2016 election, remains at the forefront of news coverage by national and local media outlets. A team from DOE recently attended a conference at the Belfer Center at Harvard University to learn best practices during a cyber-attack. The team debriefed and simulated a table-top exercise for other election staff in Juneau upon their return. The conference emphasized a strong need to develop a communications plan well before elections and following protocol. DOE is also working hand-in-hand with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to ensure elections are secure.

In early May, DOE participated in local media interviews about an intruder making a false claim on social media on Election Day in 2016. The division made itself available to explain to outlets that in no way did the incident make any impacts to the outcomes of the election. The news stories played out during the May 9 Election Policy Work Group meeting, which was addressed at the beginning of the gathering. One action item will be publishing a public incident reporting protocol to the DOE website.



May 10, 2018 - Phillip Malander (DOE), Josie Bahnke (DOE) & Bill Vajda (Office of Information Technology) take questions from the House State Affairs Committee about election security.

A hearing on Alaska’s election security system by the House State Affairs committee shortly followed the local news stories. National experts Wendy Underhill (National Conference of State Legislatures), Danielle Root (Center for American Progress), and Maurice Turner (Center for Democracy & Technology), testified during the hearing and reviewed Alaska’s security system. Shortly following the hearing, Turner wrote an article for the center’s blog titled “What the Lower 48 Can Learn About Election Security from Alaska.” The article describes Alaska’s challenges that do not exist in the Lower 48, like the state’s size, remoteness and dependence on postal service to send and receive documents. Turner described Alaska’s security system as robust and outlined how DOE uses a strategy of defense-in-depth and separates its public-facing web server from reporting tallies.

### *Election Policy Work Group*

The Election Policy Work Group focused its May discussions during the meeting around the possibility of updating Alaska’s ballot tabulation system. Four federally certified technology vendors; Hart Intercivic, Elections Systems & Software, Clear Ballot Group and Dominion Voting Systems, presented both precinct and non-precinct based potential systems to the EPWG. The group has also been researching and gathering input to see if there might be a better election process for serving Alaska voters.



May 8, 2018 - KTUU multimedia journalist Cameron Mackintosh covers vendor technology showcase in Anchorage at the Hotel Captain Cook.

### *Voting Methods Research*

DOE partnered with the Institute of Social and Economic Research from University of Alaska Anchorage to conduct a survey with registered voters in three areas of rural Alaska to see what their perceptions are of universal ballot delivery systems. Early findings of the Perceptions of Universal Ballot Delivery Systems show nearly half of all respondents prefer keeping the status quo, though fewer of them felt this way after learning about other options, such as a hybrid vote by mail system.

### *Language Panels*

The translations for ballot materials and glossaries in multiple languages is an ongoing process throughout the year. Language Assistance Compliance Manager Indra Arriaga, and Jim Chaliak led language panels in May to begin a first round of translations.



Yup’ik translation panel from left to right: Jim Chaliak, Sophie Alexie, Oscar Alexis, Mike Toyukak and Anecia Toyukak.

## *Election Worker Training*

As we get closer to the Primary and General elections, the division is busy training poll and bilingual outreach workers to ensure voters have a positive experience when casting their votes. All of DOE Regions I, II, III, and IV have been busy this summer with hosting training meetings in May and June. The division plans to hold more sessions in July. For more information about what information is covered in training sessions, visit [Training Resources](#).

## *Voter Outreach*

As the division prepares for the August 21st Primary Election and November 6 General Election, the team is looking into engaging with voters in unique ways. DOE has contracted with Alaska graphic artist Pat Race to come up with Alaska themed artwork for the Official Election Pamphlet and stickers to present to early voters. Some early designs include: a crab, beluga whale, a humpback whale and a walrus. The idea is to have each region represented by a different animal.

DOE is also developing a partnership with Northwest Strategies to craft two animation videos to be shared for television and social media as well as a radio PSA for the elections 2018 state elections will be conducted under its current precinct-based system. In recognition that Anchorage voters went through a new all by mail system for the city's municipal elections, the division is working closely with the Municipality of Anchorage to develop messaging to inform voters how they can participate in 2018 Primary and General elections and apply to receive an absentee ballot in the mail.



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