

Alaska's Election Process

- **Division of Elections employees.** Appointed by the Lieutenant Governor or hired by division managers. Employees are to remain neutral in the political climate and sign an oath of impartiality. The division has benefited by retaining long-term employees with extensive experience. DOE staff have an average of 15 years of experience and three employees have more than 25 years.
- **State Review Board.** Alaska citizens appointed by the division's director. The board is bi-partisan and two board members of different political affiliations work together. The board's role is to test election tabulation equipment and conduct a review of election materials prior to the certification of election results. The board reviews the work of the Regional Counting Boards, Absentee and Questioned Boards, and Precinct Election Boards, which are explained in more detail below.
- **Regional Counting Board.** Alaska citizens appointed by each Regional Election Supervisor. The board is bi-partisan and two board members of different political affiliations work together. The board's role is to test the election tabulation equipment following the test conducted by the State Review Board. This includes testing all precinct tabulators, voting tablets, and central scan equipment used on Election Day and for early, absentee, and questioned ballots. After testing, the board attaches a security seal to the memory card devices on each piece of voting equipment sent to the Precinct Election Boards. The board completes a security log, recording the security seal numbers, which are provided to the Precinct Election Board for verification upon acceptance. The board is also responsible for scanning voted early, absentee, and questioned ballots utilizing the central scanning and tabulating equipment.
- **Absentee and Questioned Boards.** Alaska citizens appointed by each Regional Election Supervisor. The boards are bi-partisan, and two board members of different political affiliations work together. The board's role is to review the ballots logged by division staff when processing voted absentee and questioned ballots.
- **Precinct Election Boards.** Alaska citizens appointed by each Regional Election Supervisor. The board is bi-partisan and depending on the size of the precinct will have a *minimum* of three members. However, five members at any one time is typical. Prior to opening the polls, each Precinct Election Board certifies that the tabulation equipment received from the Regional Counting Board shows zero results prior to opening the polls. In addition, they verify that all security seals and chain of custody documents are completed.

All boards and employees have an active role in completing chain of custody documents **anytime materials leave their physical possession**. This is accomplished by verifying that the sequentially numbered stub on every ballot and every security seal and tamper-evident seal match the receipt and by ensuring that material transfers are signed for. Chain of custody and security logs are maintained according to the division's records retention schedule.

Ballots and Tabulation System

Alaska's ballot tabulation system always has been and continues to be paper based. There is a paper trail for every ballot cast. Each bi-partisan Precinct Election Board receives paper ballots that are either hand-counted when the polls close or counted using a precinct tabulator (for specifics on

counting see prior webpage Alaska's Ballot Counting Process). In addition, to comply with the Help America Vote Act, each precinct has a touch screen voting tablet to accommodate voters with disabilities and voters needing required language assistance. These tablets are equipped with a voter-verifiable paper trail that allows the voter to verify the printed version of the ballot prior to casting the ballot. They are used by approximately 1% of voters.

Scanning equipment is used in 306 precincts, typically in urban locations with a high volume of voters. These precincts include 95% of all registered voters. 135 precincts do not use the scanners but hand count the ballots, due to the low volume of voters. These precincts represent 5% of all registered voters.

Alaska's ballot tabulation system is certified by the federal Election Assistance Commission and is thoroughly tested for logic and accuracy prior to each election by the bi-partisan State Review and Regional Counting Boards and tested and certified by the bi-partisan Precinct Election Board.

Only the authorized, designated division staff person designs the election database and ballots using the certified software. Ballot images are sent to the contracted in-state ballot printer. Each printed ballot has a sequentially numbered stub and the division maintains a record of the ballot stub numbers sent to each voting location. This is critical as it is part of the ballot tracking and accountability process.

After sending the ballot images with the ballot stub numbers to the printer, the authorized and designated staff person begins installing the election parameters onto the individual memory devices used to tabulate votes. This process takes place directly from the certified system. Once the memory devices are prepared, two different logic and accuracy tests are conducted by two different bi-partisan boards, the State Review Board and Regional Counting Board. This testing ensures the memory devices are accurately counting ballots. At no time during the programming or testing of the tabulation equipment is any of the equipment connected to the internet or a network. In addition to testing the memory cards, before each election, the division conducts a functionality test on each piece of equipment to ensure the equipment is in proper working order.

The final test is completed on election morning by the bi-partisan Precinct Election Board. The precinct election workers turn the tabulation equipment on and print a "zero" totals report verifying that no results have been counted on that machine. The election workers sign and secure the zero totals report inside the unit. They also inspect the inside of the ballot box verifying that it is empty before any vote is cast.

Absentee Voting (by-mail, online delivery, and fax)

The State of Alaska is a no-excuse absentee voting state. This means that any Alaska voter can apply for and vote an absentee ballot. In order to receive a ballot, voters must submit an application to the division between January 1 of the election year and 10 days before the election.

The paper application is on the division's website and any division office can provide an application to a voter. Any political party, group, or organization can also send an application to voters. This frequently results in a voter receiving multiple applications. Additionally, the Online Absentee Ballot Application System is available on the division's website. To use the system, a voter must have a valid Alaska driver's license or state ID card. Only the voter may submit an application on the voter's

behalf. An absentee ballot application cannot be submitted for someone else unless the person has a valid power of attorney which authorizes them to apply on behalf of the voter.

The application requires voters to choose the election(s) for which they are requesting an absentee ballot. Voters must swear that they are a U.S. citizen and at least 18 years of age or within 90 days of their 18th birthday. Other information that must be provided includes the voter's name, Alaska residence address, permanent mailing address, one identifier (SSN, last 4 of SSN, or AK driver's license/state ID number), birthdate, gender, military and overseas status (if applicable), if they are in remote Alaska or overseas (if applicable), ballot mailing address, contact information, signature, and date.

Military and Overseas voters are covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). Any active uniformed service member, merchant marine, commissioned corps member, their spouses and dependents, and U.S. citizens living temporarily overseas can apply for an absentee ballot under this Act. It does not matter if they are currently in Alaska or currently out-of-state. When out-of-state, they must use the Alaska residence address where they are currently registered or where they resided prior to leaving Alaska. U.S. citizens that are living overseas with no intention to return to Alaska can also apply for an absentee ballot. However, they are eligible to receive a ballot that only has Federal races. UOCAVA voters can apply using an Alaska absentee ballot application or they can apply using the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). Additionally, they can use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as an emergency backup ballot if they have not received their absentee ballot from the state. The FPCA and FWAB are forms that are created and maintained by the Federal government.

Upon receipt of an absentee ballot application, division staff process the application in the Voter Registration Elections Management System (VREMS) and schedule the voter to receive a ballot. Staff ensure voters are provided all statutorily required information and are eligible to receive a ballot. The application deadline is no later than 10 days prior to the election for which the voter is requesting an absentee ballot.

No later than 45 days prior to an election, ballot packages are sent to UOCAVA voters and voters who have indicated they live in remote Alaska or are temporarily overseas. All other ballot packages are mailed as soon as the official ballots are available, approximately 25 days prior to the election. Ballot packages include the ballot, the return envelope, voting instructions, and a grey secrecy sleeve.

Upon receipt of their ballot package, voters can vote their ballot, place it inside the grey secrecy sleeve, and then seal it in the return envelope. Voters must complete the required information on the outside of the return envelope. They must sign the envelope and provide one identifier (voter number, AK driver's license or State ID number, date of birth, or last four of SSN). They must have their signature witnessed by an authorized official or, if an authorized official is not reasonably available, by a witness 18 years of age or older. The witness provides the date and location where they witnessed the voter's signature and they also sign the envelope. Once the envelope is sealed, the voter's confidential information is not viewable until it is received by the division.

A voter may return a voted absentee by-mail ballot by mail (after applying required postage) or by dropping it off at any division office or voting location.

Ballots must be postmarked or dropped off on or before Election Day. Primary and REAA election ballots postmarked on or before Election Day must be received no later than 10 days after Election Day. General election ballots must be received 10 days after Election Day when mailed from within the U.S. and from the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. Ballots mailed from outside the U.S. must be received 15 days after the general election.

If a voter makes a mistake when casting their absentee ballot, they can contact the Absentee and Petition Office to request a replacement ballot. Additionally, if a voter decides that they would rather vote in person and no longer want to vote the absentee ballot, they are instructed to destroy and dispose of the absentee ballot.

Beginning 15 days prior to Election Day, civilian voters can also request to have their absentee ballot sent to them by electronic transmission, either by fax or online delivery. Military and overseas voters can apply for ballots delivered this way at any time.

If a voter received their absentee ballot by fax or online delivery, they can only return their voted ballot by fax or by-mail. There is currently no option to return a voted ballot through online delivery. Ballots returned by fax must be received no later than 8:00pm on Election Day. Online delivery and fax ballots returned by-mail must meet the same requirements as the ballots sent by-mail and returned by-mail.

Absentee by-mail ballots received at a Regional Elections Office are kept in a secure ballot room in date and district order. Each day a batch sheet is date-stamped and bundled by house district with ballots received that day. Ballots are never left unattended at a desk.

Logging and Review of Absentee and Questioned Ballots

For both absentee (including by-mail, in-person, and special needs) and questioned ballots, division staff connect each ballot with a voter registration record and make the initial determination to accept or reject the ballot based on what is required on the envelope, the information in the voter record, and the type of ballot received. After a ballot is logged it is assigned a sequence number.

For example, the statewide accept code "S" allows the division to count statewide races only and would apply to a voter who lives and is registered in Nome but voted a questioned ballot on Election Day in Juneau. Those locations do not share a judicial, house, or senate district so votes for those races on the ballot will not count. But these locations do share all statewide races, which include President and Vice President, US Representative, US Senate, and Governor and Lieutenant Governor, so votes for those races on the ballot will count.

The Absentee and Questioned Review Boards review all absentee and questioned ballots after they are logged by division staff. These boards review each voted ballot envelope to verify that the voter is qualified to vote in the election and to determine if the ballot was properly cast. Working in teams of two, the review of absentee ballots begins no later than one week before Election Day and the review of questioned ballots begins two days after Election Day. The review of both absentee and

questioned ballots continues through the deadline to receive ballots for each election. These boards work directly with each Regional Election Supervisor who sets the days and hours the boards will meet.

These boards use the Absentee or Questioned Review Board Report Details (details report) and review each ballot envelope against the details report. They review the voter's name and registration status, district ballot issued, residence and mailing address, ballot sequence number, district and precinct registered, registration dates, district/precinct number where voting took place, and accept or reject code assigned.

Each time these boards meet they complete an Absentee or Questioned Ballot Audit Report. This report tracks the number of ballot envelopes provided to them from the Regional Election Supervisor. After they have reviewed all ballot envelopes, they tally the total number of ballot envelopes and the different types of accept or reject codes. The boards cross check their tally against the tally from the Regional Election Supervisor. This cross check ensures that the totals and individual count and reject types processed by division staff are in agreement with the review by the board.

During the ballot review period, observers are given a public version of the details report. This report excludes all the confidential information but allows the observers to follow along with the review process. The observers can also use the information on the report to challenge count or no count determinations. Prior to submitting a written challenge, the Regional Election Supervisor will review the absentee or questioned ballot envelope and the report with the observer and answer any questions. Observer challenges must be in writing. The director is sent all challenges for determination. A challenged ballot is placed in a Challenged Ballot Envelope to easily identify the ballot. The observer has the right to withdraw their challenge at any time. Once the director has made the final decision, the decision may only be appealed during a recount or litigation. Challenged ballots remain in the Challenged Ballot Envelope, so if there is a recount or litigation they are easily identifiable and not commingled.

Election Day

Throughout Election Day, the bi-partisan Precinct Election Board maintains physical security of the ballots and equipment. Most voters at a precinct are 'regular voters' who are listed on the precinct register. After a voter has provided identification and has signed the precinct register, the board issues the voter a ballot.

Questioned ballots are voted on Election Day at a precinct. There are several reasons a person would have to vote a questioned ballot:

- their name is not on the precinct register because they are either voting out of their assigned precinct or they were not registered by the 30-day registration deadline,
- they are required to provide identification and they do not have any at the time of voting,
- their address or name has changed,
- their qualifications are challenged, or
- they have already voted.

The voter signs a questioned register (not the regular precinct register) and they complete the questioned ballot envelope. The information on this envelope allows the division to compare it to

existing information on the voter's record to determine ballot count eligibility. It also allows the division to update the voter's registration or register the voter. Voters receive a notice about the questioned ballot process. After the voter signs the questioned register and completes the required information on the envelope, they vote their ballot and then place it in a grey secrecy sleeve and seal it in the questioned envelope. Questioned ballot envelopes are placed into the ballot box, but they are not processed through the precinct scanner. Before questioned ballots are counted, they go through a review process.

Special Needs Voting

Special needs voting is for those whose disability, illness, or age prevents them from going to a polling place, It allows them to have a representative pick up and deliver a ballot to them. The representative signs a special needs register and completes one side of the special needs envelope. The voter completes the other side. The representative must provide:

- their name,
- residence and mailing address,
- social security number, voter identification number, or date of birth,
- the name of the voter, and
- a signed oath that they are receiving a ballot on behalf of the voter and will not vote the ballot for the voter, will not coerce the voter, will not divulge the vote cast by the voter, and is aware that unlawful interference with voting is punishable by law.

The Precinct Election Board tracks the number of issued and returned special needs ballots as part of the end of night ballot accountability. Returned special needs ballots are placed inside the ballot box, and like the questioned ballots, they are not processed through the precinct scanner and they go through a review process. Special needs ballots can be returned to any polling place before 8:00pm on Election Day.

After the Polls Close

Voted ballots remain secure and inside the ballot box until after the polls have closed. Once the polls have closed, the Precinct Election Board prints and signs two copies of the election results report. This report prints on a continuous paper roll that includes the morning's zero report. These reports have a date and time stamp, showing that just prior to 7:00 am when the polls open, there were zero results or ballots cast. Then, on the uninterrupted paper results report, the end of night results (total ballots cast and tabulated results) are printed. A minimum of two members of the Precinct Election Board sign the report at both the opening and closing of the polls. The State Review Board uses this report to match the number of ballots used to the number of ballots cast. The results report is the tabulated results from all ballots cast on that machine. Results reports are provided to any observer present who asks for a copy. The results report prints before the results are uploaded via cellular modem. This allows the State Review Board during their review to verify that the results transmitted are the same as the results at the time of closing.

Poll watchers, representing a candidate, party, group, or ballot measure, who are on-site throughout the voting process are welcome to observe the Precinct Election Board perform the closing procedures which include counting the votes, securing or destroying unused ballots, and securing voted ballots inside tamper-evident containers. The Precinct Election Board's process and the presence of the poll watchers on site prevent vote manipulation or the casting of fraudulent ballots.

The Precinct Election Board tracks the number of ballots issued to them from the Regional Election Supervisor; how many people voted; the method by which they voted (meaning regular voters signing the precinct register, questioned voters, and special needs voters); how many ballots were used, spoiled, unused; and the number of voter signatures. Unused ballots are either destroyed on-site or sealed inside tamper evident containers. Only after securing the unused ballots does the Precinct Election Board open the ballot box containing voted ballots. This process guarantees that voted ballots are not comingled with blank/unused ballots.

Having sequentially numbered ballot stubs is a crucial component of ballot accountability. The number of signatures on the precinct must match the number of ballots used, unless there is some anomaly, which can be explained to the State Review Board and addressed during their review process..

After the polls close and results are transmitted, two workers from each urban precincts return all the materials to the Regional Election Supervisor, signing the same chain of custody document they signed when the material was picked up. The precincts that received materials via USPS seal the materials in tamper-evident envelopes and locked containers and mail them the following day. By-mail locations ensure chain of custody with signature receipt confirmation, package tracking, and a ballot receipt and return material check in log.

The Regional Election Supervisors accept all the materials from the urban precincts. Late in the evening on election night, these materials are picked up by a contracted courier and sent on the first Alaska Airlines flight to Juneau. Materials from remote locations are delivered via USPS over the course of the week to the director's office in Juneau. Ballots from overseas military and civilian voters may arrive up to 15 days after the general election and 10 days after a primary or special election, so the Regional Election Supervisors send these materials over that period using either Alaska Airlines Goldstreak or USPS Express. Both transportation methods follow the same chain of custody and tracking documentation.

After Election Day

The morning after Election Day, division staff organize questioned ballot envelopes in numerical order according to line number the voters signed on the questioned register. They then organize the questioned ballots by precinct number and house district.

The Division of Elections has procedures in place to prevent the casting and counting of duplicate votes. These include having the signature line on the precinct register read "ALREADY VOTED" when the person has voted early or absentee, which requires the voter to cast a questioned ballot. This prompts a review and research to verify if they did in fact already vote. Once registers are printed, no absentee, questioned, or early votes are counted until voter history is done. Voter history is the term used to indicate that a voter has cast a ballot in an election. Division staff determine voter history from precinct registers and logged early, absentee, and questioned ballots.

The division also runs internal duplicate voter reports to identify those voters who may have cast more than one ballot. After comparing the voter's information and signature on the two different methods of voting and verifying that a true duplicate vote occurred, the ballot(s) are removed and not counted. Intentional duplicate voting is rare and all duplicate voter research is provided to the Department of Law.

When the duplicate vote research is complete, the Absentee and Questioned Review Boards open the ballot envelopes and remove the secrecy sleeves. The purpose of the secrecy sleeve is to maintain the privacy of the vote when removed from the envelope, which clearly identifies the voter. A two-person team then counts the number of ballots, making sure it matches the number of envelopes, and compares that to their details report, making sure that the numbers match against their Absentee or Questioned Ballot Audit Report. When the review team has finished and the Regional Election Supervisor cross checks their report, the ballots are then sealed in a large envelope and a security label is placed across the seal. Ballots are then locked inside the secure ballot room at each regional office and are ready for counting by the Regional Counting Board.

Ballots that are tabulated at the regional office are tabulated by the Regional Counting Board and not by division staff. This applies to early vote, absentee, and questioned ballots. While staff assist with the process, the board primarily handles the ballots and scans them through the central scanners. The board is provided a known number of ballots from the Regional Absentee and Questioned Review Boards and the number of ballots provided to them must equal the number scanned and the number tabulated. The board reviews the results report to ensure they match and signs off on the ballot counts. These results are added to the unofficial results up through the 15th day after the election. The Regional Counting Board functions as the Precinct Election Board in this central scanning and tabulation manner.

All materials are returned to the State Review Board for inspection and verification. This board conducts a thorough review of the materials from the Precinct Election Boards and Regional Counting Boards to ensure that the number of ballots cast, counted, and shown on the election results produced by the state's ballot tabulation system equals the number of actual voters and that the results are accurate. The State Review Board also reviews the Precinct Election Board's ballot accountability statement, confirming the number of signatures on the precinct register, the number of questioned ballots, and the number of special needs ballots.

Prior to certifying the election, the State Review Board conducts hand-count verifications of random precincts that utilize precinct scanners. The randomly selected precinct must account for at least 5% of the total votes cast in each of the 40 house districts. If there is a discrepancy of more than 1% in the hand-count verification, the board hand counts of all the ballots cast in the district. From implementation in 1998 to date, there has never been a discrepancy of 1% or greater. In fact, the few minor discrepancies that have been found are related to "marginally" marked ballots – meaning the voter did not completely fill in the oval for their selection and the scanning unit could not detect the mark.

The State Review Board also conducts a hand-count verification of early voted ballots, absentee ballots, and questioned ballots in randomly selected house districts with representation within each of the four regional offices.

After the State Review Board completes its review, the election is certified and the results are official. The process is intentionally methodical so that accuracy is ensured. Additionally, because certain ballots can be counted on the 15th day after the general election, no certification can be done before then.

The Alaska Division of Elections is dedicated to the security and accuracy of our election process. The division recognizes that any election system is susceptible to fraud if security measures are not

in place. Alaska has extensive procedures and multiple layers of security with a combination of people, processes, and technologies to help us conduct secure, trustworthy, and accurate elections.