

January 9, 2020

Testimony of Amber F. McReynolds in Support of HB 37:

Changing references to “Absentee” Voting in Public Communications to “Mail-in Voting”

1. I am providing this testimony both in my personal capacity - as an expert in the field of election administration - and currently as CEO for the National Vote At Home Institute, 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, in the Civil Action No. 17-02016 (RC), U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (2017) and Gessler v. Johnson, 2011CV6588, Denver District Court (2013). I also provided amicus curiae testimony in the recent Georgia case 1:18 – cv – 04776-LMM Martin, Bowers et al v. Kemp.
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 for the past 7 years, 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:
 - 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, 2001Professional Certifications:

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- 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.

Supporting rationale for HB 37

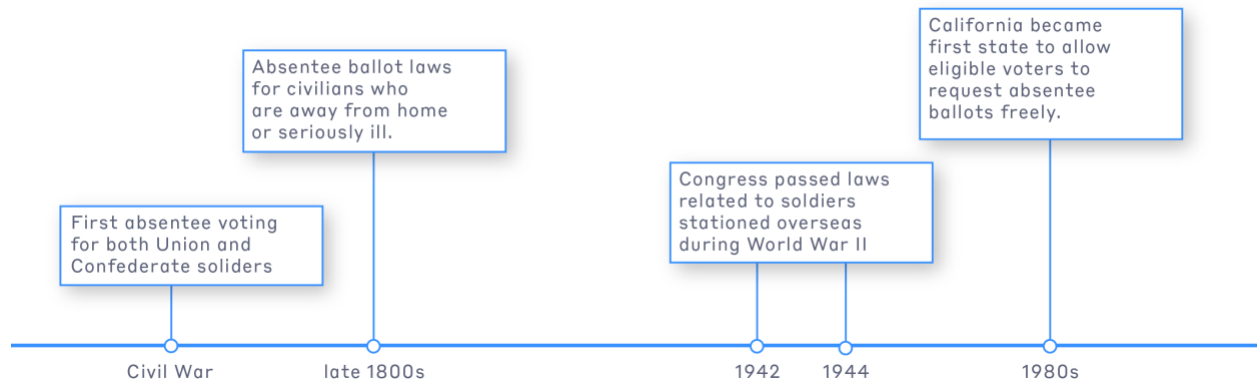
HB 37 bill has my full support, and I recommend it receive yours because it recognizes the change in voter behavior and voting choices in the country.

As our world evolves, so does our use of language. It would seem archaic at best, for a television announcer to tell us, "Don't touch that dial" anymore, or for an automobile dealer to talk about "rolling down the window." Advances in technology have made what used to be staple phrases in our vocabulary obsolete.

So, too, do changes in our culture and our behavior. The State of Oregon had its first female governor over 25 years ago and does now. Yet it was recently noticed that all official state references to that position still refer to its occupant as "he."

While some may look at such issues as over-sensitive political correctness, the fact is our use of language sends subtle messages about what is "expected" and what the norms are in our society. This is true about the use of the term "absentee" to describe voters who cast their ballot on other than Election Day in a traditional polling booth. The term and its use date from the Civil War, when soldiers were first allowed to vote from their remote ramparts. But what made sense 150 years ago does not make sense today.

Brief history of absentee ballot evolution in the US

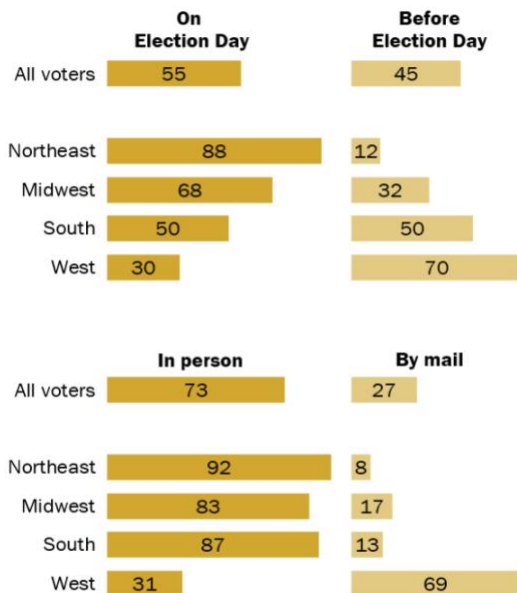


Source: MIT Election Lab

Today, voters are increasingly utilizing other means and other times to cast their ballot. The expectation that a voter must vote in-person, on a fixed day, within fixed hours is fading rapidly. That trend began in the West (with 69% of the vote cast by mailed ballots in 2018) and is spreading across the country. As such, the term “absentee” is becoming as outdated as “don’t touch that dial.”

U.S. regions vote in different ways and at different times

% of voters who say they voted ...

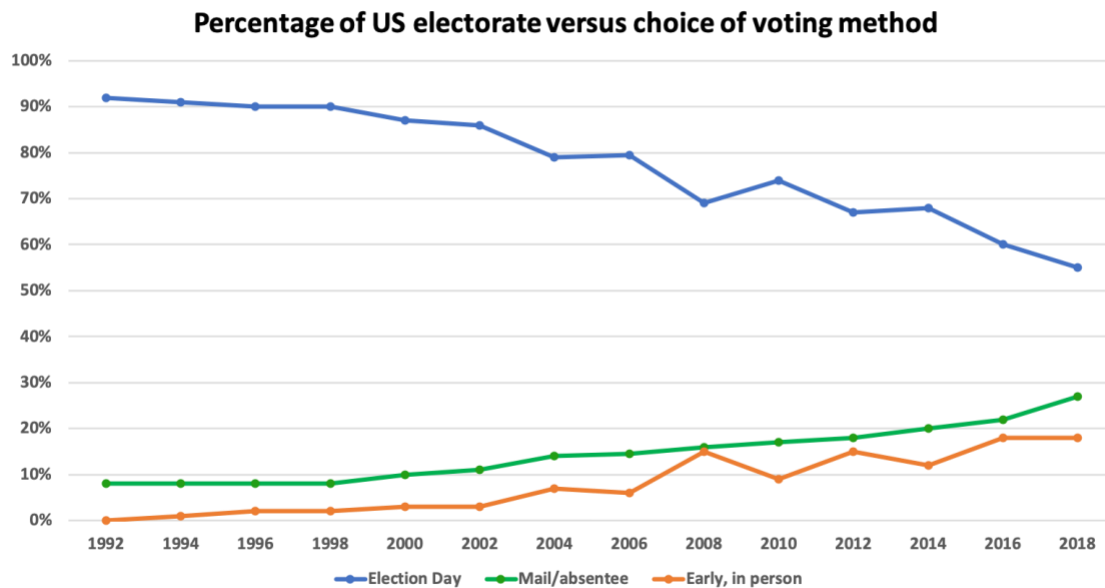


Notes: Based on U.S. citizens who say they voted. Regions based on U.S. census definition. No answer not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 7-16, 2018.

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The graphic below shows which voting methods voters are choosing nationally. Mail ballot voting is growing rapidly. If the trends continue, in-person voting on Election Day will become the exception, not the rule, as soon as 2022. In fact, if extended out a few more election cycles, it is possible and even likely that the rest of the country will evolve as the West has, with voting by mail becoming the predominant voting method in the second half of the 2020's.

Voting at Home (VAH) is growing steadily, and exceeds early in-person voting (EIPV)
By 2022, fewer than 50% of all ballots will be cast in-person on Election Day



Sources: 1992-2016:: MIT Election Lab. 2018: PEW Research

Other states are changing their use of language to reflect the new reality. New York recently passed a bill to authorize a Constitutional Amendment (required there) to move to “no excuse” absentee status, where Maryland already is. They refer to it as “Vote by Mail.” The Executive Order 64 from Connecticut, where our organization helped write the report, referred to their prospective change as “Vote by Mail.” California’s SB 450 that has them on this path uses the same language.

Changing the language in Maryland’s Public Communications, as HB 37 will do, makes sense to do now, so that Maryland accurately reflects the reality of voting in the 21st Century, and brings it in line with the national conversation.

I encourage you to support this bill.