

Montana is Ready to Vote by Mail

The recent lawsuit alleging that Montana's mail-in elections are risky discredits Montana's election administrators. Montanans can vote safely and securely by mail in this election and every election.

Over 70% of Montana ballots cast in the 2016 general election were absentee. Montana's June 2020 primary all-mail election had the highest voter primary turnout in recent history with a record-breaking number of ballots filed. Our county elections offices and US postal workers capably handled this surge in mail-in ballots. Managing 100% mail-in elections is not a stretch for the dedicated bi-partisan public servants who administer our elections.

Our election judges take an oath to protect the vote. They are the foot soldiers who defend our elections and guard our democracy. They deserve our support and gratitude, not unfounded accusations. Here are some facts about how Montana election officials in every county follow strict procedures to maintain the integrity of our elections:

- Your mailing envelope has a bar code, which is scanned and noted on your voting record in the Voter Database maintained by the Montana Secretary of State.
- Your signature on the mailing envelope is verified as a match to your signature in this database before your ballot is accepted.
- Accepted ballots are kept in a locked secure storage area as they are received.
- 1-3 business days before election day, elections offices are permitted to begin preparing the ballots for tabulation, after which the ballots are again locked in a secure room.
- Election judges work in teams of two to ensure accuracy and that no ballot is misplaced or mishandled.
- Your identity is kept separate from your ballot.
- Votes are tallied by hand or by machine and all original paper ballots are kept in case the votes need to be recounted.

Voting by mail lessens the risk of COVID-19. To ensure you can vote by mail regardless of the outcome of this baseless lawsuit, request an absentee ballot. Montana law allows you to vote by mail using an absentee ballot without explaining why you don't want to vote at a polling place. You can download the Absentee Ballot Request Form at the Montana Secretary of State's website (sosmt.gov) and send it to your county election office. Do it soon! Absentee and all mail-election ballots will be mailed out to voters on October 9, although you can request an absentee ballot after that.

Your ballot must be received by the elections office, not simply postmarked, by 8 p.m. November 3 for your vote to count. Plan to mail your ballot by October 20 for the Post Office to deliver it in time or take it to your election office drop box. Montana law also provides the option of in-person voting at your county election office on Election Day.

The best tool to ensure your mailed ballot is safe and counted is *My Voter Page* (<https://app.mt.gov/voterinfo/>) at the Secretary of State's website. Go to *My Voter Page* to verify you are an *active* voter, check your address and whether you are getting an absentee ballot. Once ballots are sent, you can check whether you were mailed a ballot and whether the elections office has received and accepted your ballot on the *My Voter Page*. If the election's office hasn't accepted it by November 3, you can go to the election office in person and request a replacement or provisional ballot on Election Day.

The League of Women Voters offers this information to help reassure Montanans as we head into the final weeks before our state and national elections. Vote by mail is safe and secure.

Honor our election officials by voting this year!

Nancy Leifer, President, League of Women Voters Montana

Rosanne Nash, President, League of Women Voters of the Bozeman Area