

League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund

Voting Procedures to Increase Voting Participation

Vote by Mail (VBM)

What it is: Ballots delivered by postal service to registered voters, who return them by mail to the election administrator for counting.

What Texas does now: Voters may vote early by mail if 65 or older, disabled, out of the county during election day and the period for early voting by personal appearance, or confined in jail but otherwise eligible. Those eligible may request ballots online or by mail to Early Voting Clerk in their county.

How VBM would work:

- Would depend on legislation. All states offer some form of VBM. Oregon provides a model for an all-VBM system, with the following procedures:
 - Registered voters receive ballot packet by mail, fill out ballot, place it in secrecy envelope, insert it into ballot-return envelope, and mail it to election administrator.
 - Ballot return envelope contains voter's signature, which election workers check against scanned copy of voter registration card.
 - Ballot is then taken out of secrecy envelope to be counted without identifying information attached.
 - Record is kept of each ballot received and tallied. Ambiguous ballots or signatures may be isolated for additional review.
 - Ballot packets undeliverable by postal service as addressed are returned to election officials, not forwarded. Those voters are then sent cards, which are forwardable, seeking new residence information.
 - Person without mailing address may use county address and vote in person.
 - Several weeks prior to election, two informational Voters Pamphlets are mailed to each household: 1) ballot measures, 2) candidates with statements from them and political parties
- Options for less than an all-VBM system include:
 - Removing limitations on who may vote by mail (no-excuse VBM).
 - Allowing voters to request to be on a permanent vote-by-mail list ("permanent absentee" list) with no need thereafter to request a ballot.
 - Establishing state guidelines for all-VBM elections and authorizing jurisdictions to choose whether to conduct them.

Arguments in favor of VBM:

- Increases turnout, including among general election voters who find it easier to vote in local and special elections that often draw less interest.
- Assures accuracy in vote count and recount due to paper ballots.
- Reduces opportunities for fraud because signatures are verified before vote is counted.
- Eases work of election administrations (no in-person election)

- Facilitates better training of election workers because fewer are involved.
- Makes it easier to maintain voter rolls.
- Counters voter mistrust of technology.
- Removes barriers that keep people from getting to the polls; e.g. time, transportation, confusion about where to vote.
- Provides voters with ballot before they vote, with time to research and discuss options.
- Reduces costs, despite printing and mailing expenses. No poll workers, polling places, and equipment to buy, deliver, and service.

Arguments against VBM:

- Increases opportunity for error.
- Increases fraud potential.
- May disenfranchise those without a mailing address.
- Suppresses voter participation; e.g. by eliminating sense of community offered by polling place.
- Increases chance that spouse or employee could coerce voter to vote a certain way.
- Encourages voting before facts become known that may affect voters' choices.
- May cost more than current system due to increasingly expensive printing and postage costs.

Discussion question: How well would VBM achieve goals of voter convenience and participation in the election process?

For more information: See LWV-TEF *Facts and Issues on Vote by Mail*.