



H.R. 281

The Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act of 2007

“No-Excuse” Absentee Voting

What Does It Do?

- The Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act would give all voters the option to vote by mail in federal elections for any reason. It would also remove additional restrictions such as notary signatures and doctor’s note requirements imposed by some states on voters requesting absentee ballots.

Why Is It Needed?

- **This bill is about fairness.** Voters in some states should not have an advantage over voters in other states for the same election. Some voters should not have to find and pay for notaries while others can request an absentee ballot at no cost and with no hassle.
- In twenty-eight states and territories, voters are only eligible for mail-in or absentee ballots if they have certain excuses such as being elderly, ill, out of town on Election Day or engaged in military service while voters in the other states can vote by mail at will.
- H.R. 281 recognizes that **many other circumstances can often prevent voters from making it to the polls on Election Day – including work, family commitments or other responsibilities.**
- H.R. 281 also makes sense because some people simply prefer to vote by mail. When these people vote from home, the polls feel less of a strain and lines are shorter for those who want to vote in person.

Which Members of Congress have Cosponsored H.R. 281?

Reps. Abercrombie, R. Andrews, Baca, Becerra, Berkley, Bishop, Blumenauer, Braley, Capps, Carson, Clarke, Clay, Cleaver, Courtney, Cummings, Artur Davis, DeLauro, Eshoo, Farr, Filner, Frank, A. Green, Grijalva, Hare, A. Hastings, Hinchey, Hirono, Holt, Honda, Hooley, Jackson, Jackson-Lee, Kennedy, Tubbs Jones, Kagen, Kilpatrick, Kind, Larsen, Levin, Loeb sack, Lofgren, Maloney, McIntyre, Matsui, McDermott, McGovern, McNerney, B. Miller, G. Miller, Mitchell, Norton, Ortiz, D. Pallone, Price, Rothman, Rush, Li. Sanchez, Schiff, Adam Smith, Space, Stark, Sutton, T. Udall, Walz, Woolsey, Wu, Wynn and Yarmuth.

Who Else Has Endorsed H.R. 281?

Common Cause, People for the American Way, VoteTrustUSA, AFL-CIO, NAACP, LDF, Inc., ACLU, The National Association of Letter Carriers, The National Association of Postal Supervisors, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), The Arc of the United States, United Cerebral Palsy, Progressive States Network, The National Association of Postmasters, American Postal Workers Union, National Postal Mail Handlers Union, National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association, The Vote by Mail Project, Postal Rate Commissioner Ruth Goldway, League of Rural Voters, The Jewish Council for Public Affairs and Working Assets.

What States and Territories Currently Allow the Universal Right to Vote by Mail?

Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

What States and Territories Have Restrictions on Voting by Mail?

Alabama, American Samoa, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia., Guam, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Northern Mariana Islands, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Virgin Islands and West Virginia.

How Difficult is it in Restricted States to Vote by Mail?

It varies. Some states go so far as to require that the voter produce a notary's seal, a doctor's note or signatures from multiple witnesses to request an absentee ballot to prove that voter fits into one of the "excuse" categories.

Is It Safe? What Safeguards Exist for Voting by Mail?

- "Vote by Mail" is a secure method of voting.
- Oregon – which runs its elections entirely by mail – has only prosecuted 4 cases of fraud over the last 6 elections.
- The 28 states and territories which currently allow voters to vote by mail for any reason have not had security problems.
- Safeguards include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - **Signature verification** – signatures can be checked against the voter's original registration form or compared to a digitized version electronically.
 - **Address verification** – ballot envelopes must be properly addressed cannot be forwarded. This provides an added level of address authentication not available at the polls.
 - **Coded ballot envelopes** and other state systems ensure no one can vote more than once in the same election.

Will Voters Still Have the Option of Going to the Polls to Vote?

Absolutely! Going to the polls on Election Day is a time-honored ritual that brings American voters together in a common act of civic participation. This bill simply gives voters the option to vote by mail.

Does H.R. 281 Give Either Political Party an Advantage?

No. States that offered universal access to mail-in ballots during the 2004 election experienced a 6.7% increase in voter turnout. **Republicans and Democrats** in these states **experienced nearly identical gains** in voter turnout during the 2004 election.

Who Supports the Universal Right to Vote by Mail?

- Studies show that overwhelming support for voting by mail is consistent across nearly every demographic – including age, income level, race, education, employment status, geographic location and party affiliation.
- A recently conducted state poll showed that nearly 30% of voters said they would vote more often if given the option to vote by mail.
- States that give voters the universal right to vote by mail experience up to 30% growth in the use of mail-in ballots.

Where can I find out more about H.R. 281?

Please contact Lisa Sherman with Rep. Susan Davis at 202-225-2040 or lisa.sherman@mail.house.gov.