Pros

- No pollworkers/sites to coordinate
- Auditable paper trail
- Voters like VBM
- Ample time to research and vote
- Higher turnout

Cons

- Material prep time for printing and mailing
- Requires high levels of staff expertise
- Vendor and equipment coordination; e.g., mailing houses, sorters, scanners, etc.
- Length of results reporting timeline

Timeline

Pre-1983: Washington Legislature authorized "permanent absentee" ballots for voters with disabilities and those age 65+, other voters to request absentee ballot for each election in writing.

1983: Special elections allowed to be conducted by mail ballot.

1991: Permanent absentee law expanded to allow any voter to join the list by request; once on the list they receive ballots for every election.

1993: Small precinct VBM law expanded to precincts with under 200 voters, some counties begin splitting precincts and moving to all VBM elections.

2005: Washington Legislature establishes VBM as a permanent part of the election process for all elections, allowing counties to choose.


How does VBM work?

All eligible voters are sent a ballot at least 18 days before election, UOCAVA up to 90 days. Mailing address can be anywhere in the world.

Marked ballot is put in a security envelope or sleeve.

The security envelope/sleeve is put in a return envelope and signed.

Ballots have pre-paid postage and are returned through the mail or at ballot drop boxes. If mailed, must be postmarked by Election Day. Drop boxes open until 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Voters can check ballot status online.

New ballots can be requested or printed, but will cancel any previously issued ballot and still need to be signature verified.

How does a VBM ballot get processed?

Envelope is scanned and marked as "Received" in the VoteWA system, then sorted into batches.

Signature is checked against voter registration records. Voter is contacted before processing if signature is missing or doesn’t match voter registration record.

Return envelope is opened and security envelope or sleeve is removed.

Security envelope or sleeve is opened and ballot is removed for processing, resulting in secrecy of the vote.

Ballot is reviewed for potential scanning issues like torn corners, then scanned and securely stored.

Scanners are not connected to any form of network or internet.

Ballots continue to be processed, cured, and tabulated until certification.
Legend

- All-Mail Elections
- Counties can opt to use
- Ballots mailed to all voters for all elections
- Some elections can be run entirely by mail