

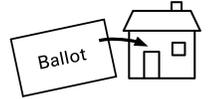
Washington State Vote-By-Mail (VBM) Fact Sheet

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.
- 2011:** With 38 of 39 counties switched to VBM, Washington Legislature requires VBM statewide.

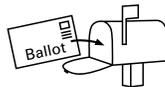
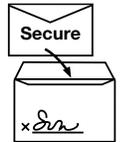
How does VBM work?

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.

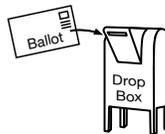


Marked ballot is put in a security envelope or sleeve.

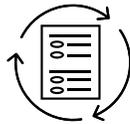
The security envelope/sleeve is put in a return envelope and signed.



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.

Pros

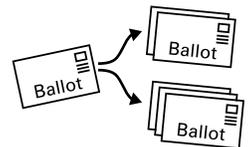
- No pollworkers/sites to coordinate
- Auditable paper trail
- Voters like VBM
- Ample time to research and vote
- Higher turnout

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

How do VBM ballots get processed?

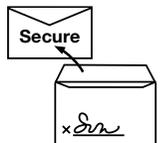
Envelopes are scanned and marked as “Received” in the VoteWA system, then sorted by precinct and district.



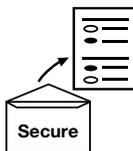
Signatures are checked against voter registration records. Voters are contacted before processing if signature is missing or doesn't match voter registration record.



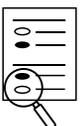
Envelopes are opened and security envelope/sleeve removed.



Second staffer removes ballot from security envelope/sleeve for processing.



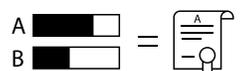
Ballots are reviewed for potential scanning issues like torn corners, then scanned and securely stored.



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



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

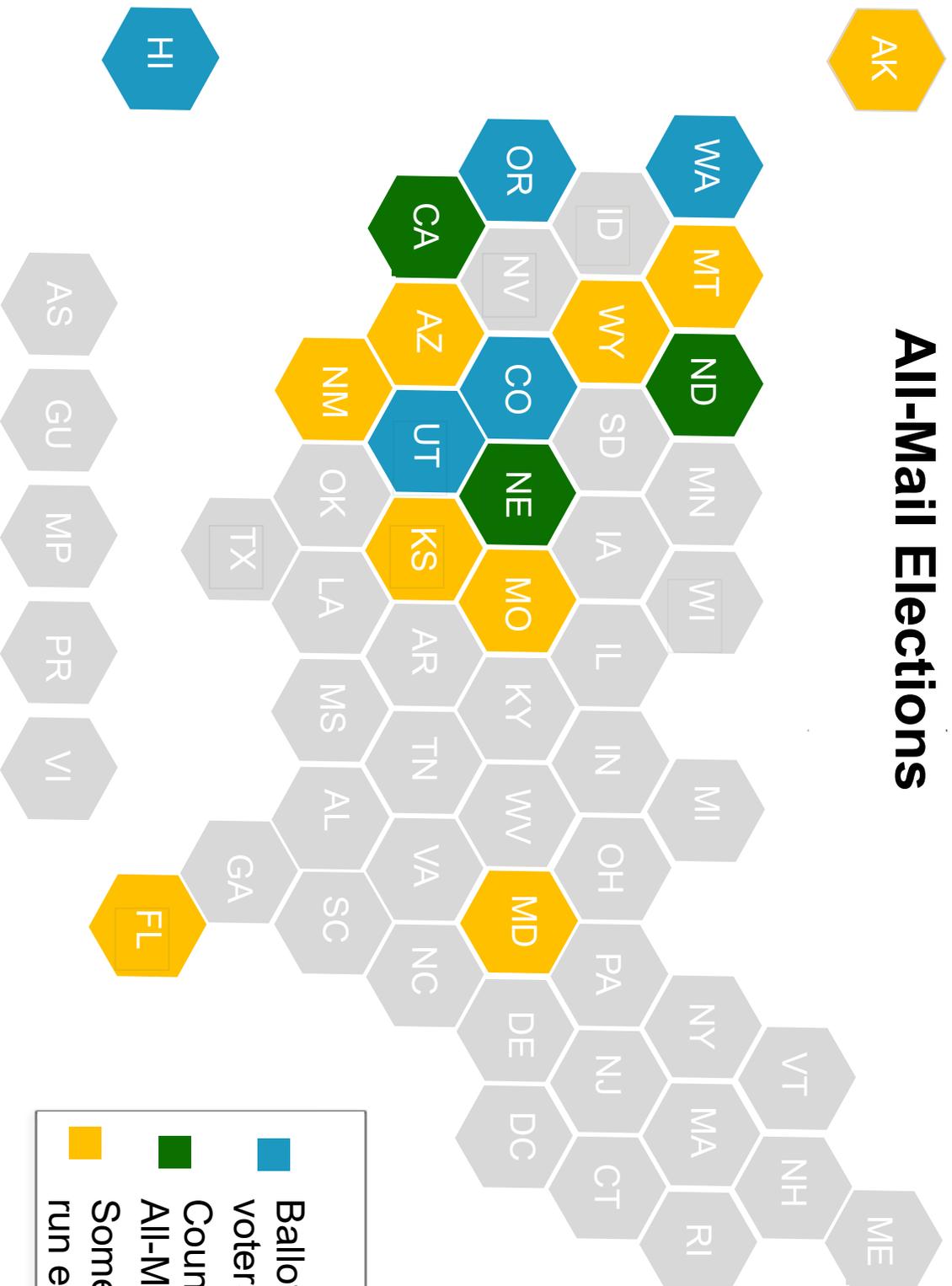


Contact Washington Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division

elections@sos.wa.gov
1-800-448-4881
sos.wa.gov/elections



All-Mail Elections



Courtesy of National Conference of State Legislators, April 2020:

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>