



EVERY LAWFULLY CAST VOTE ACCURATELY COUNTED

## Vote by Mail Concerns, Part 1

Both major parties encourage voting by mail. Registrars of Voters urge people to become permanent vote by mail voters. Four states have now become all vote by mail. Those who have already joined the over 50% in California who have opted to be permanent vote by mail voters, and those considering making that choice should be armed with some information and considerations that might impact their ultimate decision.

The vote by mail (VBM) option protects those unable to get to the polls on Election Day. There are also voters whose rural living situation requires them to vote in person at the ROV office or to vote by mail. But most voters have the privilege of voting in person on Election Day. There are some very good reasons to take advantage of that privilege in lieu of “pushing the easy button” and CHOOSING to vote by mail.

Consider the following:

- VBM ballots are not secret ballots - ***they have your name on them.*** If you have the choice, it is important to protect the right to a secret ballot by not voluntarily surrendering it.
- If you return your completed ballot by mail, you are most likely voting very early, without all of the information necessary to cast an informed vote. Campaigning continues until Election Day, and information continues to surface. Voters who submit a ballot up to 3+ weeks early may come to regret an unalterable decision.
- Your vote-by-mail ballot is vulnerable while it is the mail to you. It can be lost, mangled or stolen. Election Integrity Project Poll Observers noted that unexpected numbers of people presented themselves at the polls in 2012 claiming that their mail-in ballot never arrived.

Poll Observers and Precinct Inspectors estimated that the number doubled, even tripled, in 2014. Those voters cast provisional ballots, but the BIG question is, what happened to the original ballots?

Clearly the County Elections Office did not fail to send them, and the post office is not that inefficient. And certainly, voter error accounts for some of the reports. But it would be naïve not to consider the specter of ballot harvesting, a practice detected and verified as recently as the 2014 election. ***If any of the “missing” ballots had been harvested and voted by someone else, the provisional votes cast by the victims likely did not count because the records would reflect a previous vote in their name.***

- According to John Fund in his book *Stealing Elections*, VBM ballots are a major source of fraud and disenfranchisement. Election Integrity Project Poll Observers reported that there

were voters in 2012 who reported that their status was changed to vote-by-mail without their knowledge or permission, yet did not receive a ballot in the mail. Observers and Precinct inspectors noted that these numbers also doubled or tripled in 2014. Whether the ballots were redirected to another address or stolen before they reached the voters, these voters' only option was to vote by provisional ballot on Election Day. If someone had usurped and voted their VBM ballot, their provisional ballot would have been rejected— instant disenfranchisement and the voter would probably never know.

- Assume your ballot reaches you without mishap, as most will. It becomes vulnerable again when you mail it back. As trustworthy as the postal service is, mail does get mishandled (look forward to Part 4 for more on this), and a well-placed “mole” in the system could purposely misdirect or mangle ballots from pre-selected people or neighborhoods. It is not a chance worth taking.
- Knowing this, many VBM voters choose to submit their ballot in person at the polls, rather than relinquishing it to the postal system. (Food for thought: if you're going to the polls anyway, why not vote in person while you are there and avoid all of the other potential risks?).
- Even if you drop off your mail-in ballot in person at the County Elections Office or the polls, it is still subject to loss, mishandling or error during the extensive processing procedures within the County Elections Office, to which same-day ballots are not subject. Regardless of the efficiency and caution exercised by the Elections Office, no one and no organization is error-free.
- It is true that a vote-by-mail ballot is actually fairly secure and likely to be counted once it arrives at the County Elections Office. This is not necessarily always good news, because legitimate voters are not well protected in the event someone has harvested their ballot and voted in their name. Because the law requires that all decisions regarding signature match be “liberally construed in favor of the voter” (EC § 3000), rejection of any ballot on the basis of signature is highly unlikely. If someone has usurped your ballot, chances are very high that even though the signature is clearly not yours, it will be accepted, just as it will be if the ballot is authentic.
- Most mailed VBM ballots do reach the County Elections Office. But VBM ballots can be damaged during postal or County Elections Office handling, and would then need to be opened and copied onto a new form that can be accepted by the counting machine— duplicated by two County Elections Office employees who the voter has to hope are not dyslexic or agenda-driven. It is not a far leap to realize that this is one more opportunity for error or wrongdoing to disenfranchise voters.
- Finally, VBM ballots give SOMEONE ELSE the power to decide whether your vote will be counted or not. Signatures on the outside of the ballot must be validated prior to its being opened and counted. Your vote is subject to the judgment of whoever is tasked with that decision.

***If you are currently a vote-by-mail voter, and elect to retain that status, do everything you can to protect your vote:***

Know when the ballots are mailed out for every election. If you have not received your ballot within three days of that date, call your local elections office and report it. Generally the ballot can be deactivated and a new ballot can be mailed. If you wait any later to report a missing ballot, and it has been “harvested”, the probability is that it will be filled out and mailed by the harvester and processed (counted) at the elections office, after which nothing can be done to return your right to vote to you.

If you have received your ballot:

**You can still vote in person.** If you have an assigned polling place and you are able to go to the polls and vote in person, surrender your ballot to your polling place on Election Day and receive a same-day ballot to cast.

If you do not have an assigned polling place, either take your ballot directly to the county elections office and submit it there, or drop it off at any polling place in your county on Election Day to avoid voting early and subjecting your ballot to any potential anomalies within the postal service.

If you cannot get to the polls on Election Day, you may authorize a family member or member of your household to drop your ballot off for you at any polling place in the county. Just be sure that both you and your designee fill out the designated areas on the outside of the envelope.

***Mailing your ballot should be your last choice.***