Why Mail Ballots Are Secure

LAYERED SAFEGUARDS

Institute *for* Responsive Government

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THE ISSUE

Like all methods of voting deployed in the U.S. and other advanced democracies, mail ballots are secured by multiple layers of independent checks and balances. Recent attempts to sow doubt about mail voting — including the latest claims by President Trump and the recent ballot initiative in Maine — are based on conspiratorial thinking, not facts.

THE FACTS

Mail voting is meticulously designed to ensure overlapping safeguards at every stage of the voting process.

- **Registration checks.** Only verified registered voters receive mail ballots. During the registration process, applicant information is verified against a variety of state and federal databases, and an array of federal and state requirements ensure that election officials routinely follow up with voters to ensure their information is current.
- **Strict mail security protocols.** Ballots are sent by non-forwardable mail in clearly marked envelopes, often with specialized security protocols like opaque envelopes, tamper-evident seals, and privacy sleeves. Any ballots that are returned as undeliverable are immediately canceled.
- **Ballot tracking.** In most jurisdictions, ballots are tracked so that both election officials and voters can follow their ballot through the mailstream and ensure it's been delivered and counted as expected.
- **Signature verification.** Once received by election officials, ballots are not unsealed or removed from envelopes until and unless the information on the ballot envelope is filled out, the signature matches the voter's signature on file, and the envelope is free from signs of tampering. A failure of any one of these points will be resolved by bipartisan teams, who do not count the ballot unless they can get in touch with the voter who can confirm the authenticity of the ballot or submit a new one.
- **Physical and digital security.** Ballots don't just sit around warehouses in unsecured stacks. Like ballots cast in person, mail ballots are subject to sophisticated and redundant chain-of-custody protocols, physical seals and barriers, exceedingly controlled access, bipartisan teams, and surveillance.

BOTTOM LINE

Voting by mail is safe and secure. It's a popular choice for states across the political spectrum and is used by voters of all ideological stripes. The history of absentee voting reflects a bipartisan — and often Republican-led — commitment to providing voters with cost-effective, efficient, and user-friendly government solutions. We shouldn't let fiery, fact-free rhetoric lead us backward.

For additional resources or to talk to an expert, please contact Dan Rafter at dan@responsivegov.org.