



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

February 25, 2021

To: [Senator Rob Wagner](#), Chair  
[Senate Rules Committee](#)

Re: [SB 249](#) – Allows Elections Officials to open and count ballots on receipt – **Support**

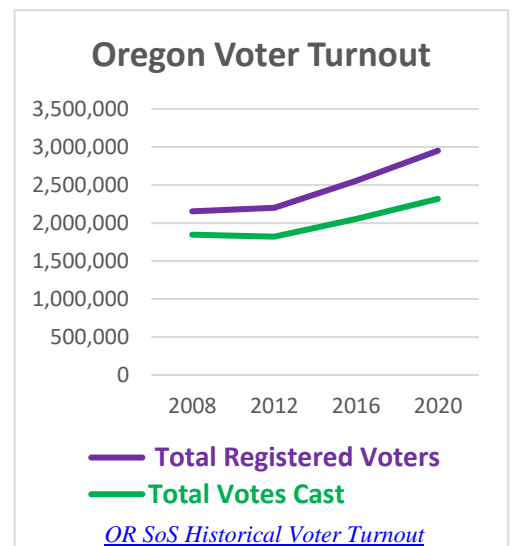
LWVOR supports *efficient, secure elections, anticipating the need to adapt, to improve methods and ballot-counting timelines*. Automated, secured ballot processing already begins before election day, *with observers*. We support SB 249 to allow timing flexibility for secure ballot processing, **as ballots arrive**. Oregon County Clerks requested this bill, which we characterize as a technical fix, not a policy change.

The League provides campaign information, think [Vote411.org](#), and we advocate for improved election methods. Both are critical to engaging our electorate. Last fall’s heavy early ballot returns were extraordinary for numerous reasons compelling the SB 249 action.

**2020 Voter engagement, registration and turnout were heavy.**

It was a contentious election, in Oregon and around the country. Oregon’s enviable voter turnout rates were maintained despite a population growth of almost 10% since our 2008 elections.

**More ballots were returned immediately.** Many Oregonians voted as soon as 2020 ballots arrived and promptly mailed or used ballot dropboxes. Voters wanted to be sure their votes counted and were worried about voter suppression as [USPS delivery delays were reported nationally](#). The [USPS wrote](#) to the Oregon Secretary of State, who [instructed voters](#) to ensure timely ballot delivery, ballot tracking with unique barcodes, and delivery with the latest USPS technology. Oregon senators called for a [reversal of postage rate increases for election mail](#). The LWV spoke to a [reversal of USPS cutbacks](#) until after elections, while Portland mailboxes were removed and [mail sorting machines were dismantled](#).



**COVID-19 challenged processing.** Elections and Post offices were challenged to safely distance employees to reduce pandemic exposure. The upsurges of mail in ballots also ate up volumes of office space. Tim Scott, Multnomah Elections Chair, [testified to this committee](#) that 80% of his 300 cyclically employed elections staff opted not to work, facing possible COVID exposure, and he was relieved that Oregon librarians were able to step in.

**Ballot Security will be maintained.** LWVOR began “vote-by-mail” support in 1987, confident that secrecy methods prevented fraud. LWVOR linked Elections videos for Multnomah and Lane Counties in [Oregon Best Vote by Mail practices](#) nationally as COVID voting concerns rose.

Oregon’s population growth, and secure vote-by-mail popularity are well-established, likely to increase the need for and value of this technical fix. We urge your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.

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LWVOR President

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LWVOR Governance Coordinator