

Testimony for SB 210
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March 31, 2025

“Scapegoating”:

In his book "Language as Symbolic Action," writer/philosopher Kenneth Burke defines the scapegoat as a mechanism where a person or group is singled out and blamed for the collective problems or negative emotions of a larger group, serving as a conduit for negative feelings and allowing for a sense of purification through their (the scapegoat) sacrifice.

In simpler words, scapegoating is a theory that explains how individuals transfer the blame for their failures onto a vulnerable group, instead of accepting responsibility themselves. Once the scapegoat is destroyed, catharsis sets in, until the need for another scapegoat arises.

The creators of SB 210, and the politics that are driving this bill, are creating a problem where there is none. While the DMV incident was unfortunate, the ramifications are miniscule. By the time the error was discovered, election officials can only say that a number of envelopes with presumably the same number of ballots were returned. There is no way that anyone can prove the ballots were completed or eligible to be processed. SB 210 is an extreme reaction and would be a slippery slope to further negatively impact vulnerable voters, such as youth, college students, minorities, married women, families, the elderly and disabled. **This is a subversive attempt to begin efforts to suppress votes.**

Vote by mail is safe, secure, efficient, and a cost savings. There are numerous checks and balances to ensure that everyone who is legally entitled to vote is able to vote. At the registration level, a national voting database system that tracks voter movement, Social Security death records, government identification cards/documents (and many other systems) ensure registration integrity.

At the election office, background checks are conducted on election workers. Returned ballots go through strict protocols: unsigned ballots set up a notice to the voter. A barcode reader scans the unique barcode on the envelope and retrieves an image of the voter's most recent registration card. The signatures on the image and envelope are compared by a trained handwriting analyst. If the signatures don't match, the voter is notified by letter and given the opportunity to correct it. Machines open the envelopes and separate the contents, ensuring voter confidentiality. Ballot processors prepare and box up the ballots for the optical scanner. The optical scanner is not connected to the Internet, so there is no possibility of a data breach or results tampering. **Throughout these processes, a bipartisan group watches over the ballots and each other. Ballots are constantly weighed by super-precise scales. Opened ballots are securely stored and never left unattended.**

In 2012, a Republican election worker in Clackamas County was caught engaging in “down ballot modifications” of what she claimed were only two ballots. **Her coworkers reported her.** She was charged with a federal felony; she was sentenced to prison, a fine, community service, and banned from election work. **The system works.**

Non-government officials posing as government officials, using obsolete and inaccurate data analyses, have been going door-to-door, harassing residents about their voting status. County officials have a system to clean up the voter rolls. **The system works.**

Due to the actions of election deniers, election workers have reported an uptick in threatening behavior towards them, sufficient enough that SB 166 was passed in 2023 to protect these workers.

The realities of one day in-person precinct voting:

The costs would be exorbitant and staffing levels would be onerous. Each precinct would need to have a bipartisan group (4-8 minimum) to staff the check-in, two or more security providers (often county deputies but possibly other security firms), an IT person, one or two “runners” to get supplies, “floaters” to fill in wherever, and a supervisor. There’s the cost of renting facilities, providing parking, janitorial services, equipment, signage, and supplies.

Scenarios of voter suppression:

What happens if:

- The building is locked during voting hours.
- Technical issues arise or the power goes out?
- Staff representatives of the minority party “get ill” or have an “emergency” and leave (or don’t show up), forcing a polling place shutdown? (In 2023, minority party legislators defied voters’ wishes and engaged in work stoppage walkouts. That could happen here).
- The lines get too long.
- Voters show up to vote, only to find out the location is closed (like Ohio where the polls were moved/closed the day before a significant election).
- A long-time voter finds out they are not in the system (like the black mayor of Kansas City, Missouri in 2020).

What about college students? Some states require students to return to their hometowns to vote but then they have to face the possibility of missing mandatory school exams or games.

If they can get the time off, frontline workers will have to take unpaid time off to vote, creating financial hardships.

Declaring voting day a federal holiday won’t work: there are still essential workers who can’t get the time off. Public transportation usually runs on limited or no schedule.

Conclusion:

If voters concerned about “election integrity” want to return to in-person voting, the solution is simple. They can call their County Election Offices and arrange for their ballots to be left in Will Call. They can travel to those offices, navigate the streets for parking, pay for parking, pick up their ballots (after presenting their government-issued ID) and then try to vote on those wobbly portable plastic (with metal tube legs) election stands. While sitting in very uncomfortable chairs, they can enjoy the screaming kids, crying babies, and watch the clock as uninformed or undecided voters take too long. In the meantime, I get to enjoy my coffee, study the voter pamphlets, engage in online research, make notes in the voters’ pamphlet, complete my ballot as my schedule allows, and drop it off at my County Elections Office. Since my county offers ballot tracking, I receive updated notifications about my ballot status.

Engaging in this civic process is our duty and our right. We should encourage voting for those who are entitled to do so. We should make it easier to vote, not harder. With the current state of our country, there are more instances of voter suppression than there are of voter fraud. Election deniers are scapegoating the vote by mail process for their lack of wins and are hoping that this leads to further voter suppression.