

The proposal to revoke Oregon's established and highly successful vote-by-mail (VBM) system represents a profound misunderstanding of its benefits and a significant threat to the democratic participation of Oregonians across the state. For decades, Oregon has been a pioneer, demonstrating that VBM is not merely a convenience but a cornerstone of an accessible, secure, and informed electoral process. To dismantle this system would be a monumental step backward, disenfranchising voters, reducing participation, and undermining the very principles of representative democracy that Oregon holds dear. The arguments against VBM often rely on misinformation and ignore the specific, tangible advantages it provides to hundreds of thousands of voters in every election cycle, advantages proven by years of practical application and consistently high voter turnout compared to national averages. Oregon's experience serves as a testament to VBM's efficacy, not a reason for its abandonment. We must vehemently oppose any effort to undo this progress and return to a less equitable, less accessible system of voting that inherently disadvantages significant portions of our population.

One of the most compelling arguments in favor of retaining VBM is its undeniable impact on voter accessibility. Oregon's diverse geography and population present unique challenges that VBM effectively overcomes. Consider voters in rural communities, who may live miles away from the nearest potential polling location. VBM eliminates the need for long travel times, time off work, or arranging transportation, ensuring their voices are not silenced by geographic barriers. Similarly, elderly voters and individuals with disabilities often face significant mobility challenges. VBM allows them to cast their ballots safely and independently from their own homes, removing obstacles that could otherwise prevent their participation. Parents with young children, individuals working multiple jobs or inflexible hours, students studying away from their registered address, and those with chronic illnesses all benefit immensely from the ability to vote on their own schedule, without the constraints of traditional polling place hours or the logistical hurdles of voting in person. Statistics consistently show Oregon ranking among the top states for voter turnout since the statewide implementation of VBM, a clear indicator that the system encourages, rather than suppresses, participation. Revoking VBM would disproportionately harm these groups, effectively erecting barriers that Oregon purposefully tore down years ago in the name of equal access to the ballot box. It transforms voting from a universal right into a privilege reserved for those with the time, resources, and physical ability to navigate an in-person system. This is fundamentally contrary to the democratic ideals of inclusion and broad participation.

Beyond accessibility, Oregon's VBM system empowers voters to make truly informed decisions, a critical component of a healthy democracy. Unlike the often-rushed experience at a traditional polling place, VBM provides voters with the necessary time and resources to carefully consider their choices. Ballots arrive weeks before the deadline, allowing ample opportunity for research and reflection. Voters can sit down at their kitchen tables with their official voter pamphlet, consult trusted news sources, research candidate platforms online, discuss complex ballot measures with family and friends, and deliberate thoughtfully without pressure. This extended period fosters a deeper engagement with the issues and candidates, leading to a more educated electorate. Voters can meticulously examine the qualifications of candidates for local, state, and federal offices, and they can thoroughly investigate the potential impacts of proposed

laws or constitutional amendments presented as ballot measures, which are often lengthy and complex. This ability to engage with the ballot over days or weeks, rather than minutes, is invaluable. It reduces the likelihood of uninformed votes based on name recognition alone or snap judgments made under pressure. The convenience of voting at home facilitates this deliberative process, integrating civic duty seamlessly into daily life rather than making it an inconvenient errand. Undoing VBM would strip voters of this crucial time for consideration, potentially leading to less informed voting and diminishing the quality of democratic discourse and outcomes. The claim that this thoughtful, convenient process is somehow less secure or legitimate ignores the robust safeguards Oregon has implemented and refined over years.

Furthermore, the security and integrity of Oregon's VBM system are well-established and rigorously maintained. Decades of experience have allowed Oregon to develop and implement multiple layers of security to protect against fraud. Signature verification is a key component: election officials meticulously compare the signature on the returned ballot envelope with the voter's registration record. Discrepancies are flagged and investigated, often involving contacting the voter directly. Ballot tracking systems allow voters to monitor the status of their ballot online, from mailing to receipt and acceptance, providing transparency and reassurance. Secure, official drop boxes are strategically located throughout each county, monitored, and collected regularly by election officials, offering a safe alternative to mailing. Strict chain-of-custody protocols govern the handling of ballots at every stage. Additionally, Oregon law imposes significant penalties for election fraud, acting as a strong deterrent. Despite persistent, largely unsubstantiated claims nationally, widespread voter fraud via VBM in Oregon is exceedingly rare, a fact confirmed by numerous reviews and audits over the years. The system is not only secure but has proven its resilience and trustworthiness election after election. To dismantle VBM based on unfounded fears would be to reject a system that has demonstrably worked well for Oregon, enhancing both participation and confidence.

In conclusion, revoking vote-by-mail in Oregon would be a deeply damaging decision, reversing decades of progress in making voting more accessible and informed. It would disenfranchise voters, particularly those in rural areas, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those with work or family constraints. It would rob voters of the valuable time needed to research candidates and measures thoroughly, potentially leading to less considered choices. It would ignore the proven security and integrity of a system that Oregon pioneered and has successfully administered for generations, resulting in consistently high voter turnout. Vote-by-mail is not a partisan issue; it is an Oregonian success story that strengthens our democracy by maximizing participation and empowering voters. It is a system that reflects Oregon's commitment to inclusivity and thoughtful civic engagement. We must stand firm in protecting this vital component of our electoral process and reject any attempts to dismantle it.