

EXHIBIT 2
DATE 02/15/2013
HB 428



Yellowstone County

Election Administrator

(406) 256-2740 P.O. Box 35002
(406) 254-7940 (FAX) Billings, MT 59107-5002
brutherford@co.yellowstone.mt.gov

February 12th, 2013

Montana House of Representatives
House State Administration Committee
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Representatives,

I am writing you in support of HB 428 carried by Representative Kary. 2012 was a banner year for absentee voting in the State of Montana where nearly 59% of Montana electors cast an absentee ballot rather than going to the polls. In fact, every Federal General election has had an increase in absentee balloting of 10% since the 2000 Presidential Election and the popularity of voting via the mail will continue to grow. In Yellowstone County, we have seen an even bigger jump in absentee voting where over 96% of the voters in the 2012 Primary Election and over 80% of the voters in the 2012 General Election voted through the mail.

This bill also gives us the opportunity to be uniform in ALL of our elections at the county level. The fact that a voter will receive an all mail ballot in early May for the School Election and then be required to request a mail ballot for the Primary Election during even years causes quite a stir with our voters. Being consistent across the board will be of great benefit to voters and to the overall turnout in our elections, especially Primary Elections that now have a lower turnout than our all mail ballot School Elections.

HB 428 also helps to reign in election costs for the Clerk and Recorders and Election Administrators of Montana. A traditional polling place election costs the local governing body around \$1.50 per voter, where an all mail ballot costs around \$1.00 per voter. With our current "hybrid system" that we are running, efficiency is lost by basically running two different kinds of elections at the same time. One portion of the election being a traditional polling place election. The other portion being all mail ballots for the voters on the annual absentee list.

For those worried about the integrity of our elections, I believe that an all mail ballot reduces that chance for fraud and clerical errors. Polling place elections are especially hard on our Election Judges who have seen their duties greatly increased over the past decade. Provisional balloting and the implementation of AutoMark machines are two examples of very cumbersome processes that judges are hesitant to learn or even unwilling to do at the polls. An all mail ballot places these processes in the hands of full time staffers that are well trained rather than a volunteer that may only work twice every two years.

The Montana Votes Database also provides an extra level of protection in all mail ballot elections as everything is tracked electronically. Multiple ballots cannot be checked in for one voter. Signatures must be verified for every ballot returned to the Election Department. And once again, the operators of the system are trained professionals rather than volunteer Election Judges.

As far as undeliverable ballots are concerned, the mailing houses and the USPS do not deliver ballots to addresses that do not have the specified voter domiciling in it. They immediately return the flagged ballot to the local Election Department who then sends a fowardable notice to the voter letting them know that their ballot is on file and may not be forwarded until the voter has reregistered.

Because of these reasons, I believe the most sensible move is to pass HB 428 and give those responsible for conducting our elections the tools they need to conduct fair and transparent elections. I hope that you agree and the Committee of the Whole gets a chance to approve it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bret Rutherford
Election Administrator
Yellowstone County
406 256-2740