



Yellowstone County
Election Administrator

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

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to you today in support of HB 287 brought before you by Representative Bryce Bennett. As the Election Administrator for Montana's most populated county, I have several reasons to ask for your support in revising absentee ballot list confirmation laws.

First, Yellowstone County now has over 64,000 duly registered nonmilitary voters on the biennial absentee list. On February 1st, 2018 that number will fall to zero and each of those 64,000 voters will need to reapply for the 2018 election cycle if HB 287 does not pass. We do not require voters to reregister every even year, therefore a voter's absentee preference should be treated in the same manner unless they move or request to be removed from the list.

Second, the current law puts an undue fiscal burden on Montana's counties. Yellowstone County has spent roughly \$40,000 every even year on postage, envelopes, and staff hours reproducing data that was already in the voter database. As mentioned earlier, we now have 64,000 individuals on the list and the estimated cost for the 2018 cycle will be over \$51,000.

My third, and most important point, is that the current system does not increase election security beyond identifying potential moves or bad addresses. HB 287 requires election offices to cross reference the USPS National Change of Address(NCOA) database to ensure that only properly registered voters receive a ballot by mail. Of the 51,000 renewals sent out by Yellowstone County in January of 2016, 2,800 were identified as bad or insufficient by the NCOA before any letters hit the mail stream. Under this bill, our office would focus on those individuals rather than electors with up to date information.

For these reasons, it is time to do change a time consuming and fiscally unsound process while keeping the one portion that helps to keep our voter rolls as up to date as possible for an estimated \$2,500 rather than over \$50,000 in Yellowstone County alone.

I apologize that I am unable to be present for the hearing but please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Bret Rutherford
Election Administrator
Yellowstone County