

Meeting Minutes
Absentee Ballot Work Group
July 28, 2021
Washington Building
1100 Bank Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Members Present: Jim Nix, Allison Robbins, Frank Leone, Janet Riddick, Greg Riddlemoser, Walt Latham, Brenda Cabrera, Angela Turner, Diana Dutton, Jackie Britt, Roger Omwake, Teri Smithson

ELECT Staff Present: Rachel Lawless, Confidential Policy Assistant; Daniel Davenport, Policy Analyst.

Welcome and Introductions

At 1:04 P.M., Rachel Lawless opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance. Rachel also introduced Maxfield Daley-Watson and Javon Davis, who would later present during the meeting.

Update on Options for Reporting Absentee Ballots by Precinct Presentation

Maxfield Daley-Watson, ELECT Intern, began his presentation with an update on the purpose of reporting absentee ballots. He specified that this method of reporting is intended to address concerns about election transparency and provide increased detail for post election analysis and that the policy would expect localities to report precinct specific absentee voting data on election night. Next, he addressed feedback from several members of the working group surrounding their interest in how other states report absentee ballots.

Through this discussion he explained that a majority of states report their absentee ballots by precinct, but provide some flexibility for localities surrounding how they would like to accomplish the task. Maxfield then focused the presentation on the costs and burdens associated with this change in absentee vote reporting. He explained that localities could either receive precinct specific absentee ballots from vendors or use a ballot on demand system to print these ballots as needed at early voting locations within the locality. Maxfield explained the benefits and drawbacks associated with both options and that either choice would be considerably expensive, but the cost would be specific to each locality. He finished the formal presentation with a discussion about the Department of Elections recommendation that absentee ballots be reported by precinct and that ELECT should be responsible for developing the necessary certification standards for the new process of reporting absentee ballots. The presentation ended with a brief period of discussion about the updated information. Members of the working group focused much of their attention on the issue of reporting absentee ballots by precinct on election night, a task many members of the group viewed as overly complicated and expensive.

Witness Signature Alternatives Update

Javon Davis, ELECT Intern, began his presentation with a brief explanation of the background of the project and the directive of the General Assembly to prepare a report on alternative options for the witness signature requirements for absentee ballots in Virginia. Next, he notified the Work Group that, based on their feedback, additional information will be added to the report to detail the voting by mail process and an additional option to retain the witness signature. He finished the presentation by summarizing feedback from the Work Group on the three original options presented at the last meeting.

Following the presentation, the Work Group discussed the options presented and made several suggestions for the report and which option would work best for the Commonwealth. The Work Group had a lively discussion about the witness signature requirement, signature matching, and the adequacy of relying on the "Statement of Voter." The Work Group appeared to arrive at a consensus that requiring the voter to add the last four digits of their social security number and year of birth would provide enough information to identify the voter and not cause burdens on election officials.

Public Comment

The president of the Virginia chapter for the League of Women Voters read a statement detailing the groups opposition to a witness signature and signature matching requirement for vote by mail absentee ballots.

Another member of the public requested that ELECT send them both presentations for further review.

Meeting Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:49 P.M.