

Administration of Absentee Ballot Programs

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Key Terminology

- Precinct, Election-Day Voting
 - Secret ballot cast at official polling place on official Election Day
- Convenience Voting
 - Absentee: ballots can be obtained and returned by mail, in advance of Election Day, completed in uncontrolled setting of voter's choice
 - Vote-by-Mail: all ballots cast absentee
 - Early Voting: secret ballot cast at official polling places prior to official Election Day

Absentee Logistics

- Ballot requests
 - Excuse or no-Excuse?
 - How? By mail, internet, in-person, phone,...?
- Ballot submission
 - How? By mail, in-person, by third-party
 - Voter-validation: signature and witness requirements, multiple envelopes
- Ballot processing
 - Accept or reject according to due date, voter-validation requirements
 - When processed/counted
 - When opened and votes counted

Inherent Tradeoffs (no “best” practice)

- Full across-state coordination on dates, format, etc. is unrealistic (contrary to robust federalism).
- Later deadlines could lower rejection rates, but burden officials, delay tabulation.
- Less difficult voter-validation can lower rejection rates, but facilitates fraud.
- Convenience voting complicates late ballot changes, but is popular and growing.

Best-Practice Recommendations

1. Early voting is more secure than absentee voting and thus should be preferred.
2. Requests for absentee ballots should be accepted by a variety of means including mail, phone, fax, electronic mail, and Internet web sites.
3. States should provide pre-paid postage with absentee ballots.
4. The potential for online submission of absentee ballots should be studied, but approached with caution.
5. States should facilitate and encourage after-the-fact checking by absentee voters to determine whether their ballots were accepted and counted.
6. States should not tally absentee ballots in advance of Election Day.