

Senate Rules Committee
SB 1517-1 Public Hearing 02/24/2012
Testimony in opposition to SB 1517-1
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The question we have to ask ourselves is this: Do we want more secure elections or less secure elections? If this bill is passed into law, it will unmistakably move us in a less secure direction.

We have a law in place that prohibits unused ballots in election offices after the polls are closed. This bill will make it legal to have blank ballots sitting in boxes to be pulled out when needed, until deemed "practicable" by the county clerk.

This bill removes from ORS 254-483 the following wording:

*[Immediately after 8 p.m. on the day of an election:]
[(1) The county clerk shall destroy all unused absentee and regular ballots in the county clerk's possession.]*

Destroying unused ballots is an important step in safeguarding elections. Not that long ago we voted by paper ballot and every step of the voting process was watched over by election observers. Consider for a moment, what have we lost in our rush to utilize technology and produce election results to the hounding media at 8:00 election night?

We have lost faith in the integrity of our elections through the loss of public oversight of elections.

With vote-by-mail it is difficult, if not impossible for the public to oversee the processing of ballots. Ballots are handled for weeks on end. One county is currently breaking the law by keeping these ballots on hand until the election is certified. The public should be able to observe the process if they are willing to do so.

One of the safeguards put in place is that these blank ballots are destroyed as soon as the polls close. Counties that break the law, by keeping these ballots in boxes and pulling them out when needed are facilitating a serious breach in election security.

The new security procedures proposed in SB 1517 are not enough, because they do not ensure public oversight. The county security procedures are not even subject to public oversight.

The excuse I have heard for not destroying the ballots is that there isn't time on election night. If there isn't enough time on election night, there is an easy solution to that: Destroy the extra ballots after the last ballots are mailed. Any extra ballots needed after that should be printed in a different color. Ballots that are returned undeliverable should be immediately shredded and should not even be in the election offices.

I would like to know why counties are printing all of these extra ballots in the first place. Are their lists that inaccurate? Some of the unused ballots that sit around in boxes are ballots that were returned in

the mail as undeliverable. Why is that happening? We could save thousands of dollars through less printing costs, postage and staff handling of these unnecessary ballots if an audit was done of the voting lists.

Ballots going to addresses where the voter does not live is a breach of security. Some counties rationalize keeping the returned undeliverable ballots on hand, because they actually use the forwarding address sticker as the source of updating their records. That is unreliable information.

Would any of us send anything of value to an address we found on a forwarding sticker? I don't think so. Ballots are valuable, they are important to the function of our government.

People that are desperate to get someone elected will take measures to change the results of an election. We need to be working toward more secure elections, not away from secure elections. We must protect the ballot and our vote as if it is gold, because it is.

We are counting on election officials to make every step of the election safe, subject to public oversight and transparent to voters. The state law to protect our vote, by destroying ballots in a timely manner is in place for a very good reason.

Please do not move SB 1517-1 out of committee.