



Senate Bill 683: Paid Postage for all Ballots

Requires state to pay for ballot return envelopes that can be returned by business reply mail for each election held in this state. The state would only pay for ballots that were returned without a postage stamp. The state would not pay for ballots dropped in drop box locations.

Problem/Background:

- 42% of new, first-time voters don't have a postage stamp in their home.
- Members of the military serving in non-combat zones - including overseas - are required to provide a stamp on their ballot. An estimated 1,011 persons serving in the military but voting at foreign addresses were sent a ballot in 2016. That's nearly 1 in 6 military voters in Oregon¹. In 2014, 74% of military ballots went unreturned².
- Oregonians with visual disabilities may need additional postage for their larger-format ballot.
- When ballots weigh more than the estimated average 1oz limit for letter mail, all voters are required to affix additional postage for their ballot to be accepted via mail.

Solution:

The state will pay for business reply postage only for all ballots returned by U.S. mail during Oregon elections.

The Details:

- Postage paid would be business reply, meaning only ballots returned by mail would be paid for by the state.
- The policy would go into effect in July of 2019, and would not affect an election until the May 2020 primary.
- In 2016, LFO determined the approx. cost for the 2017-2019 biennium would have been approximately \$1.8 million. It would not have a budget impact this biennium.
- In the 2014 general election, 38% of ballots were returned by mail.

Other States:

- Several counties in California already pay for postage on their ballots. Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher (D-San Diego) has introduced a bill this session to extend that policy to all counties. In California, one county found in 2012 that 1 in 20 ballots were being returned with no postage.
- King County in Washington did a pilot in two February 2017 special elections to test the impact of paid postage on voter turnout. Both special elections saw voter turnout increase significantly - from 30 percent expected to 37 and 40 percent.³

Supporters: The Bus Project, OSPIRG, Common Cause, Oregon Progressive Party, Independent Party of Oregon, Oregon League of Conservation Voters, The Oregon Working Families Party, Unite Oregon, PCUN, Causa, Latino Network, SEIU Local 503, SEIU Local 49, Oregon Environmental Council, Family Forward Oregon, AFSCME, AFT Oregon, OPAL Environmental Justice, Basic Rights Oregon, ACLU of Oregon, AFT Oregon, Disability Rights Oregon, IDD Coalition, Oregon Student Association, Northwest Health Foundation, The NAACP Portland Branch

¹ Data from the Oregon Secretary of State, Elections Division

² Pew Charitable Trust Elections Performance Index

³ King County Elections