

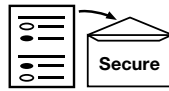
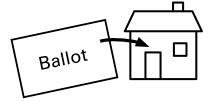
# Washington State Vote-By-Mail (VBM) Fact Sheet

## Timeline

- Pre-1983:** Washington Legislature authorized “permanent absentee” ballots for voters with disabilities and those age 65+, other voters to request absentee ballot for each election in writing.
- 1983:** Special elections allowed to be conducted by mail ballot.
- 1991:** Permanent absentee law expanded to allow any voter to join the list by request; once on the list they receive ballots for every election.
- 1993:** Small precinct VBM law expanded to precincts with under 200 voters, some counties begin splitting precincts and moving to all VBM elections.
- 2005:** Washington Legislature establishes VBM as a permanent option of the election process for all elections, allowing counties to choose.
- 2011:** With 38 of 39 counties switched to VBM, Washington Legislature requires VBM statewide.

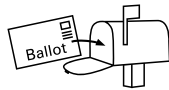
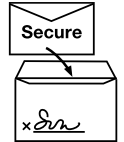
## How does VBM work?

All eligible voters are sent a ballot at least 18 days before election, military and overseas up to 90 days. Mailing address can be anywhere in the world.

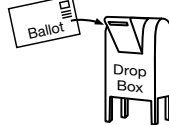


Marked ballot is put in a security envelope/sleeve.

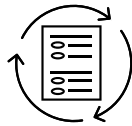
The security envelope/sleeve is put in a return envelope, which the voter signs.



Ballots have pre-paid postage and are returned through the mail or at ballot drop boxes. If mailed, must be postmarked by election day. Drop boxes open until 8 p.m. on election day.



Voters can check ballot status online. Updates may take 3–4 days.



New ballots can be requested or printed, but will suspend any previously issued ballot and still need to be signature verified.

## Benefits

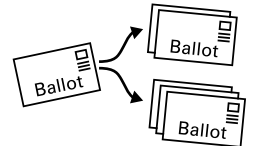
- Fewer pollworkers/sites to coordinate
- Auditable paper trail
- Every eligible registered voter receives a ballot
- Ample time to research and vote
- Higher turnout

## Challenges

- Material prep time for printing and mailing
- Requires high levels of staff expertise
- Vendor and equipment coordination (e.g., mailing houses, sorters, scanners, etc.)
- Length of time to report final results

## How does a VBM ballot get processed?

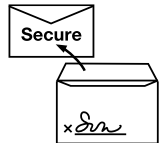
Envelope is scanned and marked as “Received” in the VoteWA system, then sorted into batches.



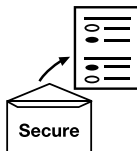
Signature is checked against voter registration records. Voter is contacted before processing if signature is missing or doesn’t match voter registration record.



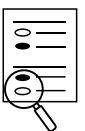
Return envelope is opened and security envelope/sleeve is removed.



Security envelope/sleeve is opened and ballot is removed for processing, resulting in secrecy of the vote.



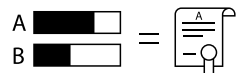
Ballot is reviewed for potential scanning issues like torn corners, then scanned and securely stored.



Scanners are not connected to any form of network or internet.



Ballots continue to be processed, cured, and tabulated until certification.



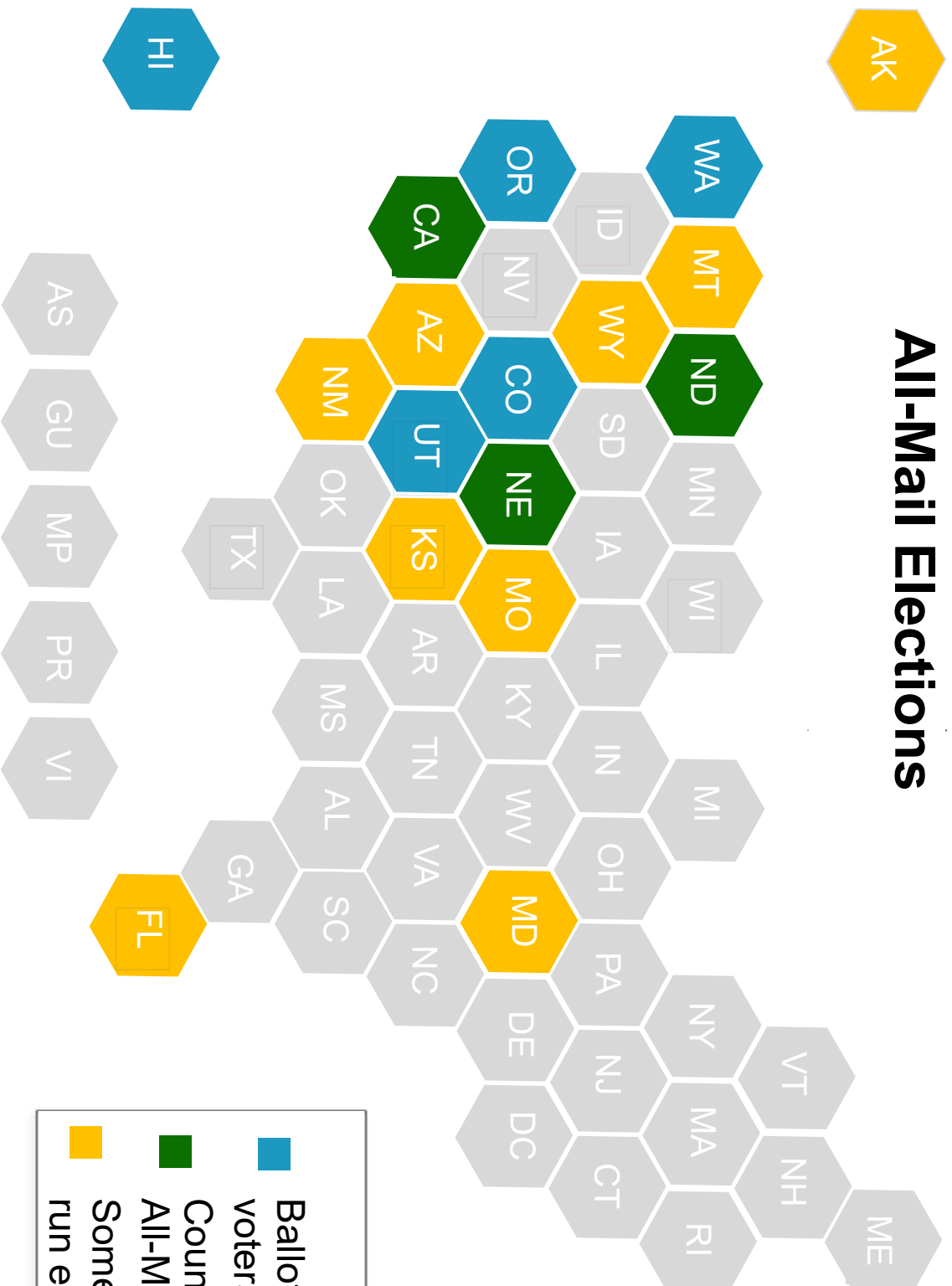
## Contact Washington Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division

elections@sos.wa.gov  
1 (800) 448-4881  
sos.wa.gov/elections



**WASHINGTON**  
Secretary of State  
Elections Division

# All-Mail Elections



Courtesy of National Conference of State Legislators, April 2020:

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>