



KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH

1900 First Avenue Ste 115 • KETCHIKAN, ALASKA 99901

• 907/228-6605 • fax 907/228-6697

www.kgbak.us

OFFICE OF THE BOROUGH CLERK

Senator Bert Stedman
State Capitol Room 518
Juneau AK, 99801

January 27, 2021

Re: Opposing Section 22 of SB 39 Related to By-Mail Elections

Honorable Senator Stedman:

Section 22 of Senate Bill 39, if enacted, would among other things, amend AS 29.26.010 by adding a clause that states:

"A municipality may not mail a general or special election ballot to a voter unless the voter affirmatively requests to vote by mail in that election."

This action would be in direct opposition to provisions in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough code of ordinances (KGBC). Specifically, KGBC 5.55.010 provides that the borough clerk may conduct a regular or special election by mail, and that a ballot shall be sent to each person whose name appears on the official voter registration list prepared under AS 15.07.125 for that election.

Primarily, the above referenced section of Borough code was put into place to provide for increased voter accessibility. The provision to allow the borough clerk to conduct a regular or special election by mail offers the flexibility to respond directly to the needs of the community at a given time. If a special election is called during a season when a large part of our community is engaged in fishing or tourism-related jobs, an in-person election may be impractical and inaccessible for Borough voters. Results have shown increased voter turnout for by-mail elections. This has recently been proven in the Alaska municipalities of Anchorage and Juneau.

Additionally, for smaller service area special elections, an in-person election would be fiscally prohibitive. The added cost of securing precinct officials, plus the added time and materials for setting up a precinct would not be practical. Conducting a small service area special election by mail is more efficient, and has proven to yield a higher voter turnout.

Finally, Alaskan municipalities should retain the authority to conduct elections in a manner that serves the citizens and the specific needs of the community. The municipal clerk, working together with the local elected body, has been given the statutory authority to conduct local elections. This local authority should remain in place.

I respectfully request that you work to amend SB 39 to remove Section 22. Thank you in advance for your consideration and your hard work this Legislative session.

Respectfully,

Kacie Paxton, Borough Clerk