

Municipal Impact Statement on Proposed Elections Legislation

House Bills 63, 43, and 21

Alaska Municipal League (AML)

Overview

The Alaska Municipal League recognizes the importance of election integrity, accessibility, and local control in the administration of elections across the state. While HB 63, HB 43, and HB 21 primarily address state-level election processes, AML is concerned with any provisions that may impact municipal and school district elections, particularly in rural communities where access to voting can be challenging.

Analysis of Key Provisions and Their Municipal Impact

House Bill 63 – "An Act Relating to Elections; and Providing for an Effective Date."

HB 63 proposes several changes to election procedures, including:

- New requirements for voter identification.
- Adjustments to the absentee ballot process.
- Revisions to ballot counting and reporting procedures.

Municipal Impact

- **Potential Barriers to Voting:** Increased voter ID requirements could disproportionately affect rural voters, including those in remote communities where obtaining state-issued identification is more difficult due to limited DMV services.
- **Absentee Voting:** Any limitations on the absentee ballot process could make voting more difficult for Alaskans who live in communities without accessible polling places or those who rely on mail-in voting due to geographic constraints.
- **Election Administration:** If municipalities or school districts are required to conform to new state-imposed election procedures, this could increase administrative burdens and costs.

House Bill 43 – "An Act Relating to Ballot Tracking, Voting Machines, and Ballot Counting."

HB 43 focuses on transparency in election processes, with provisions that:

- Require a statewide ballot tracking system.
- Establish new security and audit requirements for voting machines.

Municipal Impact

- **Ballot Tracking Considerations:** While increased transparency is beneficial, any requirement for local governments to implement a ballot tracking system for municipal elections could be costly and difficult to implement in rural areas with inconsistent postal service.
- **Voting Machine Requirements:** If new security and audit requirements extend to municipal elections, local governments may face financial and technical challenges in compliance, particularly if they must replace existing voting systems or invest in additional security measures.

House Bill 21 – "An Act Relating to Ballot Collection and Voting Access."

HB 21 seeks to regulate ballot collection efforts and expand voting opportunities, including:

- New restrictions on third-party ballot collection.
- Provisions to improve voter access.

Municipal Impact

- **Ballot Collection Restrictions:** Many rural voters rely on trusted individuals or organizations to assist in returning ballots. Restricting third-party ballot collection could create barriers, particularly for voters in communities without reliable mail service or polling locations.

- **Potential for Increased Access:** If provisions in this bill expand voting opportunities, such as increased access to early voting or vote centers, this could benefit municipal voters—particularly in rural areas where in-person voting is difficult.

None of the three bills (HB 63, HB 43, HB 21) explicitly amend Title 29 (Municipal Government) of the Alaska Statutes, which governs municipal elections. Instead, these bills primarily focus on Title 15 (Elections), which pertains to state elections. However, there could be indirect effects on municipalities if future regulations or interpretations extend state election procedures to local elections.

Potential Indirect Effects on Municipal Elections (Title 29)

While these bills do not directly amend Title 29, some provisions may still affect municipal and school district elections in the following ways:

1. **HB 63 – Voter ID and Absentee Voting Changes**
 - If municipal elections are encouraged or required to adopt similar voter ID requirements or absentee voting restrictions, it could impose additional administrative burdens.
 - Local election officials may need to adjust procedures to align with state expectations, even if not explicitly mandated under Title 29.
2. **HB 43 – Ballot Tracking and Voting Machine Regulations**
 - If future interpretations apply new security and audit requirements to municipal elections, municipalities could face increased compliance costs and logistical challenges.
 - Title 29 allows municipalities to conduct elections differently (e.g., by-mail elections), and any state-level changes could create conflicts or require adjustments.
3. **HB 21 – Ballot Collection Restrictions**
 - Many rural communities rely on ballot collection assistance due to mail service limitations. If similar restrictions are imposed at the local level, voter turnout could be affected.
 - Title 29 grants municipalities autonomy in conducting elections, and any perceived pressure to align with state rules could limit that flexibility.

Key Takeaway

None of these bills explicitly amend Title 29, but AML will monitor whether:

- Future regulations or guidance attempt to apply these state election procedures to municipal and school district elections.
- There is legislative momentum to impose uniform election rules on all jurisdictions, potentially eroding local control over election administration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

AML is concerned about unintended consequences for municipal and school district elections, such as:

1. **Administrative Burden:** Municipal clerks and election officials may face increased costs and logistical challenges if state election changes are applied to local elections, or in their support role.
2. **Rural Voting Access:** Any provisions that limit absentee voting, impose strict ID requirements, or restrict ballot collection could disproportionately affect rural communities, diminishing participation.
3. **Local Control:** Municipalities should retain flexibility in conducting their own elections, without state mandates that increase costs or reduce accessibility.

AML recommends that lawmakers ensure municipal elections remain independent from state-imposed mandates that could disrupt or complicate local election processes.