

## Mail Ballot Justification

Presented by Linda Daley, the La Plata County Clerk, to the La Plata County BOCC 3/16/10

Colorado counties have had the option of conducting odd numbered year elections by mail since 1992 and La Plata County has successfully conducted 10 such elections. The mail ballot election process became so popular with voters that in 2007 the law was changed to give voters the option of receiving their ballot by mail permanently. Then in 2009 the legislature changed the law to allow counties the option of conducting the Primary Election by mail.

The following are a few examples of safeguards that must be followed when the Primary Election is held by mail:

Verification of voter signatures on returned ballots against voter records.

Ballots are mailed first class to active and inactive-failed to vote affiliated voters.

Ballot envelopes must have “DO NOT FORWARD ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED”, also official election logo on the face of the envelope to alert post office and voters of the importance of this mail.

If the voter has moved without changing their voting address the voter may come into the election office for a replacement ballot and the original ballot is voided.

As ballots are returned to the election office they are logged into the system and the voter is given credit for voting, preventing voters from casting more than one ballot per election.

One large difference in costs for polling place elections versus mail elections at a Primary election is ballot printing. Polling place elections must be reported by style and precinct, mail ballot elections are reported by style only. A polling place election requires printing 240 ballot styles one for each party, times thirty precincts, times the four different methods of voting we must provide or 240 styles. An election conducted by mail would mean we have to print two styles, one for each party. Results need to be reported by style only. Each additional style requires a unique plate for printing and increases the printing costs.

In these tough economic times when resources are scarce, mail ballot elections make sense for the following reasons:

<b>Precinct Election</b>	<b>Mail Election</b>
More ballot printing required	Fewer ballots printed
20 polling locations	One drop site at election office
Program 44 election machines	2 or 3 machines
Supplies for 30 precincts	N/A
300 judges & training	10-12 judges
Postage for mail ballot requests	Postage for all ballots (bulk savings)

Counties are strapped with enormous fiscal liabilities by maintaining voting systems that are used every other year in presidential and gubernatorial contests. Ballots continue to expand, with multiple page front and back ballots, voters dislike voting long ballots in the voting booth and given the convenience, are increasingly requesting mail ballots.

If the concern of voters opposed to voting by mail is the possibility of voter fraud, there are many safeguards in place to prevent any abuse or fraud. The consistency of the mail ballot process is better than polling place voting for the following reasons:

Election judges receive one day of training every other year to work at the polls and it is difficult for them to grasp all the rules in one training. An example from the last election is the polling place judges accepted out of state driver's licenses for ID in spite of the instructions making it clear only Colorado licenses were acceptable.

The judges who work on mail ballot elections are working under the direct supervision of the election staff whose responsibility it is to know current election laws and rules therefore all problems can be addressed immediately. If an issue arises with a mail ballot, the election office is required to contact the voter and give them the opportunity for resolution. (Signature missing, ballot missing, missing ID)

The same rules for watchers at polling place elections apply to the mail ballot process, watchers are allowed to follow the process.

With the printing of so many different ballot styles it is not an uncommon occurrence for a voter to be given the wrong ballot style when the lines are long and voters are impatient. Mail ballots are printed with fewer styles and sorted before the ballots are mailed to voters.

New rules this year allow mail ballots to be returned to any polling place on Election Day. This change will add the need for additional judges at polling places as well as more ballot boxes for deposit of mail ballots. The election office will now have two judges of opposite parties, driving around the county on Election Day to pick-up deposited mail ballots and bring them back to the election office to be processed.

Elections conducted entirely by mail must be returned to the designated drop site or mailed back to the election office and the verification of signatures and preparation for counting these ballots may begin 10 days prior to the election, resulting in more timely election returns.

Support for conducting mail ballot elections is clear from the results of the 2008 election:

Mail ballot	14,246
Early voting	5,711
Provisional	476
Polling place	7,684

We currently have applications for 11,572 permanent mail ballots to be sent this year. This number is down from 2008 due to voters who moved after the 2008 election and canceled their voter registration. The number of applications increases daily and as we get closer to the election our numbers will be up again.