

This FAQ outlines the use and efficacy of safeguards in the VAH system when implemented according to our best practices as outlined by the National Vote at Home Institute (NVAHI) and as implemented in various states and jurisdictions across the country.

1) Is voter fraud already a huge problem? Will this make it worse?

First of all, we reject the idea that voter fraud is a problem on a large, medium or even small scale. On the whole, voter fraud anywhere is exceedingly rare. And the per capita rate of fraud is no higher, and often lower, in the 100% or high mailed-out ballot use states. For example, the last one in Oregon is from 2013, with a total of 2 mailed-out ballot related cases since 2000 when 100% vote by mail became the law. The last Washington absentee fraud case was in 2010, before they went to 100% VBM. Colorado had one absentee prosecution in 2012 and one in 2017, one before and one after they went to 100% mailed-out ballots.

2) Can a voter “lose a ballot,” request a new one and vote twice?

No, ballot envelopes are barcoded to the individual voter. Upon return, only one ballot from any voter is accepted - the first one in. Others are rejected – and if criminal intent is suspected, the voter could be prosecuted. Ballots in an envelope with no barcode are rejected.

3) Can someone steal a ballot out of the mail and vote it?

- a) Stealing, attempting to steal, or even hiding another person’s mail is a Federal felony offense. Second, voter fraud, depending on the situation can be both state and federal crimes. The return on investment of defrauding a single vote is hardly worth the cost, but there are ramifications for those who do.
- b) To ensure that only eligible electors cast a vote, voter validation is a key piece of the process. The recommended best practice today is a robust and demographically blind signature verification procedure that includes bipartisan teams of trained signature judges. This eliminates opportunities for unconscious bias or human error by volunteer poll workers. This means every return ballot envelope is signed by the voter, and each signature is validated based on official signatures already on file – e.g. the voter’s registration document, prior election ballot envelopes, motor vehicle transactions, etc. Signature judges can be trained utilizing best practices from handwriting experts, including many from law enforcement. If the signature doesn’t match, and a secondary bipartisan review team cannot determine a match, the voter is contacted immediately and given multiple paths to resolve the discrepancy. This “cure” period extends after Election Day to allow all votes to be counted.

4) What about North Carolina? They had a major voter fraud scandal recently.

There were five major reasons for the problems in North Carolina’s 9th Congressional district.

- Burdensome witness requirements. Bad actors utilized a weakness in their witnessing rules by offering a “service” to unsuspecting voters. If North Carolina had used voter signature verification instead of a witness process, voters would not have required the “assistance” of these bad actors who then tampered with their ballots.
- Insufficient drop-off options for voters. In North Carolina, if the voter has not mailed back their ballot in time, the law requires hand delivery to a county election office, which may be many miles away. Again, bad actors offered “assistance,” even though the law says the deliverer should be a close relative. Ample secure drop boxes, available 24/7, could help remove this opening.

- Lack of a ballot tracking system. Being able to track the ballot (as you would a package) both on the way to the voter and on the return path would have flagged the ballots that “went missing.” This technology is used in many states that have high mailed-out ballot use.
- Lack of good communications with voters. Clear design and voter education are key. Warnings such as “seal your ballot once it is voted” and “do not provide your completed ballot to someone you do not know and trust” can help.
- Lack of protections in the law. Strong penalties matter. In Oregon, tampering with a mailed-out ballot is a felony, carrying a \$25,000 fine and five years in jail for each ballot. Misdirect a handful of ballots and the bad actor could face decades in prison.

5) Will non-citizens be able to get ballots and vote illegally?

No, the question of U.S. citizenship is handled during the voter registration process, which occurs before a ballot can be mailed.

6) What happens if someone dies? Do they still get a ballot that someone can fill out for them?

Ballots only go out to active registered voters. States and local jurisdictions with effective Vote at Home systems have automated processes that regularly match death records to the voter registration lists to prevent ballots going to a deceased voter. And signature verification provides a second level of security.

7) People move all the time, how can we be sure their ballots aren’t going to an old address where someone could intercept it?

First, ballots are non-forwardable and anyone tampering with it is committing a crime and will also be caught by a signature verification system. Second, Vote at Home recommends that states utilize the USPS National Change of Address (NCOA) database and that states become part of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) which shares address change data nationwide. Vote at Home encourages states to implement policies like automatic voter registration that helps capture address changes from other government touchpoints like the DMV or other social service agencies.

8) What if I don’t get my ballot in the mail or I don’t trust the postal service to deliver it?

- a) The USPS is an incredibly reliable service, but if for some reason you do not receive your ballot (or even spill coffee on it or misplace it), you can request a new one from your local clerk or vote in person.
- b) If you are very concerned that your ballot will not be returned or that you missed the mail deadline, you can always utilize a 24/7 dropbox or take the ballot to your polling place. Some states even provide drive-thru ballot drop off options.
- c) Other states use ballot tracking tools (like UPS or FedEx tracking) to inform a voter where their ballot is in the process in real time. Ex: when a ballot is mailed, delivered, received, signature verified and counted. If there is a discrepancy, missing signature or other issue, the system can even notify the voter and help them remedy the problem.

9) If I have my ballot at home, what if my family members or people close to me unduly pressure me to vote for their candidate/issue?

While undue influence is possible (and also a crime) in almost any election system, hundreds of millions of VAH ballots cast over the last 20 years reveal it’s a non-problem. Those concerned about this issue should instead work to strengthen state laws that deter and punish bad actors from taking advantage of voters.

10) I heard it is so easy to divert ballots, and that if people do it, they would only get a slap on the wrist if they get caught. Is that true?

False. As mentioned above, in Oregon, if you intentionally tamper with or divert a mailed-out ballot, it is a felony, punishable by a \$25,000 fine and up to 5 years in jail **for every ballot**. Stiff penalties make the risk/reward equation of someone thinking about election interference unthinkable.

11) Is vote by mail just a plot from the political “left”?

Truthfully, every state has a vote by mail process right now. They only differ by how broadly they offer mail ballots to voters and how they administer the system. Many states that could be considered “conservative,” “red,” or even “Republican” have a large number of voters who prefer to vote by mail. Utah, for instance, was the 4th state to move to an all vote by mail system. Republicans also dominate in Montana and Arizona, where 70% of voters automatically are mailed their ballots as “permanent absentee” voters. Nebraska and North Dakota, also Republican-dominated states, have also expanded the use of vote at home options in a number of counties. While Oregon and Washington, the first two states where VAH initially took hold, are today more “blue than red,” both states have elected Secretaries of State who are Republicans – and big fans of this system.

12) Can someone create a fake ballot?

No, envelopes incorporate security measures like personalized barcodes that ensure that only one ballot is cast per person. In addition, ballots are printed on specific ballot stock. Every ballot is inspected at the time of separating it from the envelope to ensure the ballot is part of the election being conducted.