

ELIMINATE BALLOT HARVESTING

During the 2020 election, officials in many states, including Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Wisconsin, cited concerns about COVID-19 to disregard vital measures that protect the chain of custody for ballots between the time they are cast and when they are counted. One of the most egregious examples occurred when officials ignored state law and allowed ballot harvesting—the transportation of ballots to various voting locations by a third party on behalf of a voter or group of voters. Ballot harvesting creates the opportunity for individuals and organizations to cheat in elections by abusing the ballot chain of custody process.

Some states allow ballot harvesting with restrictions, such as limiting the number of ballots someone can harvest or requiring a familial relationship between the voter and harvester. Other states have lenient regulations or no laws regarding ballot harvesting. Unfortunately, during the last presidential election, ballot harvesting was allowed to go unchecked in record numbers.

Many states unwisely followed in the steps of places such as California, which expanded the law in 2016 to allow paid workers to collect ballots from private residences. The problem of removing guardrails designed to protect legal voters was exacerbated by the hastily allowed policy of mass mail-in ballots. As a result, the combination of a record-setting influx of ballots mailed to citizens and the removal of regulations on ballot harvesters created opportunities for fraud.

Compounding matters further, states and localities installed drop boxes where people could place completed ballots without proper monitoring. This practice opened these states up to violations of written law and fraud, which unsurprisingly led to lawsuits. Hastily creating a new system whereby an unprecedented number of mail-in ballots are

transported by an unknown number of people and delivered unregulated into an often-unmonitored drop box is not a recipe for instilling confidence in elections. The security of these ballot drop boxes was so weak that the boxes themselves sometimes went missing, were vandalized, or were set on fire. Worse yet, there was no accounting for the ballots inside.

Investigations into malfeasance remain underway today. These investigations include evaluating testimonies of payments made to people who collected ballots, commonly referred to as “mules.” The mules are accused of depositing multiple ballots at various drop boxes, manipulating elderly voters at nursing homes to hand over ballots, and bribing local election officials to boost turnout of certain political voters.

Ballot harvesting is a ripe opportunity for individuals and organizations to cheat in elections. Allowing ballot harvesting is a mistake. States should prioritize transparency and accountability by banning the practice.

THE FACTS

- ★ 9 states allow a family member to submit a ballot in place of a voter, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.
- ★ 31 states allow the voter to choose someone to submit the ballot in his or her place, although some states have set limits on who can collect the ballots or how many they are allowed to collect.
- ★ Alabama is the only state to require a ballot to be returned by the recipient of the ballot.
- ★ 13 states say nothing about ballot collection, which allows unfettered ballot harvesting.

THE AMERICA FIRST AGENDA

At the state level, support policies that:

- ★ Eliminate drop boxes for mail-in ballots.
- ★ Prohibit a person from returning more than two mail- in ballots, and limit who can return a ballot to a familial relationship.
- ★ Eliminate mass mailing of unsolicited mail-in ballots.
- ★ Require an affidavit for mail-in ballot applications that affirms the voter is incapable of voting on Election Day
- ★ and affirms eligibility under defined state law.
Require a witness signature for mail-in ballots.
Implement statewide ballot tracking.
- ★ Reform the mail-in ballot process by requiring the matching driver's license number or last four digits of a social security number on absentee applications and inside the envelope of a returned ballot.
 - This allows a form of ID that protects the personal identifiable information of the voter but allows for validation, which is needed because of the rise of ballot harvesting in certain states.
- ★ Prohibit any organization or entity from paying individuals to collect ballots.

REFERENCES

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