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## FISCAL UPDATE Article

Fiscal Services Division

May 7, 2020



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### NCSL COVID-19 WEBINAR — COVID-19: HOW'S IT CHANGING ELECTIONS?

**Webinar Series.** On May 6, 2020, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) held a webinar related to election issues and adjustments related to the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States. The information in this article is current as of the date of the webinar. The webinar is posted on the NCSL's [website](#). The webinar was presented in three parts. Director Wendy Underhill of the NCSL's Elections and Redistricting Program gave an overview of state responses, Senator Andrew LaGrone of Nebraska detailed Nebraska's vote-by-mail process, and Senior Advisor Tammy Patrick of the Democracy Fund spoke on national trends and best practices for remote voting.

**State Responses.** As of May 6, 2020, 18 states have delayed primary or runoff elections due to COVID-19, and 11 states have made the decision to mail absentee ballot applications to all registered voters. In addition to approximately nine states with existing portals, three states have created online portals for voters to request absentee ballots in response to COVID-19. Five states currently mail ballots to all voters, and three states allow individual counties to mail ballots to county residents.

**Nebraska.** Nebraska has had no-excuse absentee voting since 1999, but in the most recent election approximately 75.0% of voters voted in person. While 63 of Nebraska's 93 counties qualify to do the entirety of their voting by mail, 10 of the 63 have applied for and been approved for all-mail voting. Voters have the option of voting in person, but if they choose to vote by absentee ballot, they may return their ballots by mail with postage paid by the voter, return their ballots to the local election office, or place their ballots in a ballot drop box.

Nebraska's ballot security process focuses on maintenance of the voter registration list and a three-step signature verification process for each ballot, beginning with a signature match at the county level, followed by a recommendation to the canvassing board by the Secretary of State, and then a cure process if the signature fails to meet match criteria.

**Trends and Best Practices.** Over the last 22 years, there has been a national trend from voting in person on election day to voting by mail and early voting. States are facilitating election participation by creating online voter registration options or automatically registering voters through other means. States should expect 2020 to be an outlier with higher absentee voting, as a recent Pew Research Center poll showed 66.0% of those polled would feel uncomfortable going to a polling place to vote.

This increase in absentee or mail-in voting is expected to create additional concerns including the United States Postal Service's (USPS) ability to both deliver the ballots to the voters and return the ballots to be counted, postmarking requirements causing votes to fail to be counted, and voter registration messaging difficulties during COVID-19 mitigation measures. The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) published a report entitled "[Logical Election Policy: Report and Recommendations of BPC's Task Force on Elections](#)" in January 2020 with additional best practices.

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Doc ID 1136267