



Washington State Democrats | Every Race in Every Place

## Guidance on Safe and Secure Voting

### Summary and Purpose:

Amid fears of cost-cutting measures at the U.S. Postal Service and false claims by the Trump administration, election officials across Washington State have begun reviewing security plans at ballot drop boxes and voting centers, strengthening ties with local law enforcement, and training election workers to prepare for voter intimidation tactics. Certain counties like King have taken steps to implement election workers to monitor drop boxes against voter suppression. Since the presidential debate, there has been surging concern by voters over the prospect of harassment at drop boxes and voting centers. We must continue to assuage voter anxiety and fears, and ensure election officials adhere to strict security protocols.

### Safe Voting at Drop Boxes/Voting Centers:

#### Legal Background

State law prohibits interfering with or impeding the voting process within 25 feet of drop boxes or any other ballot deposit site. WAC 434-250-100(6).

No person may interfere with a voter attempting to vote by disrupting the administration of the voting center, or obstructing the doors or entries to prevent free access at a voting center. RCW 29A.84.510. RCW 49A.40.160(7).

Any sheriff, deputy sheriff, or municipal law enforcement officer shall stop prohibited activity relating to elections, and may arrest any person engaging in the prohibited activity. RCW 29A.84.510.

“Any person who uses menace, force, threat, or any unlawful means towards any voter to hinder or deter such a voter from voting . . . is guilty of a class C felony punishable.” RCW 29A.84.620.

Whenever necessary to maintain order, the county auditor may contact a law enforcement agency for assistance. WAC 434-250-100(6).

Washington law makes it illegal for groups of people to organize as private militias without permission from the state. The “right of the individual citizen to bear arms in defense of himself, or the state,” does not authorize “individuals or corporations to organize, maintain or employ an armed body of men.” Wash. Const. art. I, § 18.

It is a crime for a person to “create[] an impression that he or she is a law enforcement officer” and do “an act with intent to convey the impression that he or she is acting in an official capacity” such that “a reasonable person would believe the person is a law enforcement officer.” Wash. Rev. Code § 9A.60.045.



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### Security Measures with Drop Boxes

*Emptying of Drop Boxes:* 2 people must be present any time drop boxes are emptied to ensure there are witnesses to the process. They must log the date and time they remove ballots along with their names, so there is a record of who handled the ballots. Each time a drop box is unlocked and emptied, a tamper-evident seal is placed on the access door. This means that when election workers return to the drop box, they will be able to see if someone opened it and accessed the ballots without permission. All seals are numbered and serial numbers are logged by election workers. Certain counties like Pierce and King require election workers to take photos of the empty drop boxes as proof that all ballots were removed.

*Transport of Ballots from Drop Boxes:* Only trained county election employees are authorized to transport ballots. They sign an oath that they will uphold the integrity of the election process. Ballots are moved from drop boxes to counting facilities in a secure container closed using a numeric seal. At the tabulation center, the number on the seal is checked against the paperwork that was filled out when the drop box was emptied. State law requires that a second copy of the paperwork be kept inside the container for verification.

Some counties ensure they can track the process of emptying drop boxes. Pierce County, for example, issues county-owned phones to election workers during ballot transport and tracks via GPS system. The same electronic system is used to monitor status of drop boxes remotely.

*Monitoring of Drop Boxes for Emptying:* State law requires county elections officials to make sure ballot boxes are not overflowing. Drop boxes hold about 5,000 ballots. Most counties do regular pickups with some counties like King and Snohomish retrieving ballots from drop boxes daily, with additional pickups on Election Day and the day before. In Pierce County, pickups generally occur every 48 hours, then more often in the final two days of voting.

### Security Features of Drop Boxes

Drop boxes are typically bolted to the ground with quarter/half-inch-thick steel weighing over 600 pounds. Last year, a Thurston County drop box was undamaged when an SUV drove into and knocked the steel box on its side. A collision a few years ago with a school bus failed to destroy a drop box.

According to county election officials, drop boxes are fire, rain, and crash resistant. Some drop boxes also have chemical fire suppressants inside to ensure ballots don't go up in flames. The lip is specifically angled to prevent insertion of liquid from damaging ballots.



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### What should I do if I encounter voter intimidation at a drop box or voting center?

Step 1: Document what you see (video, photos):

- Are they carrying firearms? What are they doing? What are they wearing (insignia)? Do they appear to be provoking or threatening violence? Are they turning people away from the drop box/voting center? Are people turning away from the polling station after seeing or speaking with them?

Step 2: Move to a safe distance.

- If you see a situation that could, or does, pose a danger to life or property, call 9-1-1.

Step 3: Call the Voter Protection Hotline to report what you see at (206) 309-VOTE

- Send documented footage/photos to [grassroots@wa-democrats.org](mailto:grassroots@wa-democrats.org)

### What should I do if I encounter an overflowing drop box or unsecured ballot envelopes?

Step 1: Do not touch any of the ballots or transfer ballots to an alternative location

Step 2: Document what you see (video, photos):

- How many ballots are spilling out? Is there an object obstructing the drop box lip? Is the drop box damaged?

Step 3: Call the Voter Protection Hotline to report what you see at (206) 309-VOTE

- Send documented footage/photos to [grassroots@wa-democrats.org](mailto:grassroots@wa-democrats.org)