Emergency Medical Ballots: Challenges and Strategies for Improvement

Fred Nisen

# Slide 2

## Emergency Medical Ballots

Used for an in-person voter unable to go to a polling place because of a medical emergency the week of Election Day (e.g., in a hospital, homebound, etc.).

# Slide 3

## Background

A clear majority of the calls we received on our Voting Hotline over the last several election cycles were from voters who were hospitalized or otherwise unable to get to a polling location due to a medical emergency who wished to able to cast their ballot.

# Slide 4

## Every Elections Office Has Its Own Process.

* Counties widely differ on how a voter may obtain and cast an emergency medical ballot.
* Some require very specific forms, specific designation of an agent for the voter and multiple trips back and forth from the voter to the Elections Office.
* There is no uniformity.

# Slide 5

## The Elections Code Only Requires Certain Specific Information.

* The Elections Code (sec. 3021) has only a minimum of specific requirements for an Emergency Medical Ballot Application form, such as Name, Location, Date, Designated Agent and Signature of Voter.
* Voters may request an emergency medical ballot when the deadline for requesting a regular VBM ballot has passed. (7 days prior to the Election).
* No specific form is required.

# Slide 6

## Example #1

* Last June, a voter was unexpectedly hospitalized in a rural county and wanted to vote. His granddaughter contacted DRC’s hotline to request assistance getting his ballot. We gave him information on how to vote in the hospital.
* Unfortunately, the hospital did not have access to the emergency medical ballot request form and had not been trained on the process to assist voters in this situation.
* The granddaughter could not make two trips to the County Elections Office and the County was unable to deliver a ballot to the voter due to their limited staffing. As a result, the voter was unable to cast his ballot in the Elections.

# Slide 7

## Example #2

* A hospitalized voter with a spinal infection called DRC’s Voting Hotline on Election Day to find out if she could vote in the hospital.
* I emailed her a sample emergency medical ballot application I created based on the statute and explained the process.
* The voter’s husband took the signed application form to County Elections Office and delivered his wife’s ballot to her.
* After the voter completed her ballot, her husband delivered it to the polling place nearest to the hospital by 8PM on Election Night.

# Slide 8

## Suggestions for Improvements

* Simplifying the process and using a recommended emergency medical ballot application form, a draft of which the State VAAC is considering would make it more convenient for voters to obtain an emergency medical ballot where necessary.
* Voter education through Voter Information Guides, online on the County Elections offices and perhaps a video on the Secretary of State’s website.
* Ensure application form is available online.
* Communication with hospitals and train hospital staff to use application form.
* Additional Voter outreach can be developed to further publicize the Emergency Medical Ballot availability.