

Alabama Absentee Ballot Advisory Task Force
Minutes of the Called Meeting
October 4, 2017

The called meeting of the Alabama Absentee Ballot Advisory Task Force was convened by Secretary of State John Merrill, at approximately 10:10am in the Regions Room of the Alabama State Archives Building, in Montgomery. Members present were Mary Harris, Circuit Clerk, Shelby County; Chris May, Circuit Clerk, Randolph County and President of the Alabama Circuit Clerks Association; Mary Moore, Circuit Clerk, Perry County; Susan Odom, Circuit Clerk, Walker County; Chris Priest, Circuit Clerk, Morgan County; J.D. Snoddy, Circuit Clerk, Winston County; and Carla Woodall, Circuit Clerk, Houston County. Other persons in attendance included Brent Beal, Legal Counsel, Office of the Secretary of State, and Ed Packard, Administrator of Elections, Office of the Secretary of State.

Secretary Merrill welcomed the members of the task force. He then explained the charge of the task force to the members: to review absentee laws and procedures to identify ways to improve absentee balloting in the State of Alabama.

Secretary of Merrill discussed efforts to reform absentee balloting in the 2017 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature by requiring photo ID during the application process for an absentee ballot, removing the reasons for voting by absentee ballot, and removing the witness/notarization requirement from the absentee affidavit envelope.

Secretary Merrill stated that he created the task force to bring Circuit Clerks, as stakeholders, to the table who may not have been involved in previous efforts to reform absentee balloting in Alabama.

Each Circuit Clerk was then given an opportunity to introduce themselves and provide preliminary statements or comments regarding their observations and thoughts on absentee balloting under current law. Issues discussed included keeping the witness/notarization requirement (to prevent fraud); keeping the reasons for voting an absentee ballot (to prevent fraud); untimely delivery of ballots by the U.S. Postal Service; rewriting instructions for absentee voters; extended the time to return absentee ballots for all voters as with UOCAVA voters; permitting a death in the family to qualify as a reason to vote an emergency absentee ballot; allowing voters to return ballots through common carriers such as UPS and FedEx; clear explanation of data required for federal EAVS survey reporting; including the date of birth on the Overseas Voter Certificate for UOCAVA voters; repealing the requirement to post a public list of who has applied for an absentee ballot; the retention period for absentee ballots and affidavit envelopes after an election; and permitting electronic application for absentee voting by UOCAVA voters.

Secretary Merrill distributed Alabama's absentee voting laws to members of the task force. He also distributed information about absentee ballot requirements in other states and asked the members to review.

Secretary Merrill assigned Mary Harris, Mary Moore, and Carla Woodall to a subcommittee to identify areas of absentee voting for review and discussion for the next meeting of the task force. Mary Harris was designated the chair of the subcommittee.

The next meeting of the task force was scheduled for November 3, 2017, at 10:00am in the Regions Room of the Alabama State Archives Building.

Secretary Merrill adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:45am.

J. N. Merrill *Nov 7, 2017*