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## Enact DC Election Reform

### BACKGROUND

Most states – but not the District – have adopted election reforms such as ‘early voting’ and ‘no-excuse’ absentee voting. In addition, 8 states permit ‘same-day registration’ on election day. These reforms make it easier for residents to vote and thereby increase voter turnout.

In recent years, 32 states have adopted early voting that allows citizens to vote several weeks before election day. Maryland voters this past November approved overwhelmingly a ballot measure to allow its General Assembly to establish early voting starting in 2010. About one-third of all US voters cast ballots early in the November 2008 election, up from 14% in 2000.

Early voting not only increases turnout. It allows voters to clear up eligibility issues when they are not listed on government voter registration rolls, allows election officials to test and troubleshoot voting equipment and reduces long lines on election day.

Eight states now permit same day registration and voting, and North Carolina allows it during early voting. This one-stop registration and voting allows citizens who missed the registration deadline to still vote. It also is especially helpful to the many voters who have moved within a state but not updated an address change with the local Election Board.

Interestingly, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century voter-initiated registration did not even exist in the US. Its initiation was intended to suppress voting by former slaves and new immigrants. Also, in most industrialized democracies, voters do not even have to register, as the government is responsible for this.

Some 28 states allow no-excuse absentee voting but the District (Maryland and Virginia too) requires its voters to provide an excuse.

Oregon conducts its elections entirely by mail. Washington State allows its counties to do so and in 2006, 33 of 39 counties did (38 in 2008), accounting for 85% of the state’s voters. California allows citizens to sign up to permanently receive ballots by mail and in 2006 over 40% did so.

Voting by mail reduces election day logistical problems of equipment failure, long lines, poorly trained poll workers and, because it uses paper ballots, avoids the concerns expressed about electronic voting machines that lack an audit trail.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommended to form the basis of a proposed 'DC Election Reform Act of 2009' that could be implemented during the 2010 elections.

1. Allow early voting three weeks before the Primary and General Elections, including weekends, at one or more voting locations in each ward or at Police District Stations.
2. Allow same-day registration during early voting and on election days.
3. Eliminate requiring an excuse to vote by absentee ballot.
4. Require a study of the practicality and cost-effectiveness of voting by mail, to be conducted by the DC Board of Elections with participation of an Advisory Council of citizens and organizations.

**SOURCES:**

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- DEMOS website - Election Day Registration, Nov. 24, 2008
- Common Cause website, 'Early and Accurate Voting by Mail', Nov. 24, 2008
- Brennan Center for Justice website, 'Universal Voter Registration', Nov. 22, 2008
- Maryland State Board of Elections website, Dec. 30, 2008
- Washington Post, 'Nov. 4 Isn't the Only Election Day', October 1, 2008
- Washington Post Editorial, Nov. 9, 2008
- Washington State Secretary of State website, March. 21, 2009