



Background Reading for Election Laws in Kentucky

In the 2020 General Election, in-person voting was difficult, even risky, because of the COVID19 pandemic. Like many states, the Commonwealth of Kentucky allowed temporary changes to make it easier to vote. One change was to allow voting by mail with no excuse required. Any registered voter was allowed to use a mail-in absentee ballot if they wished, rather than voting in person. Another was to allow early voting in addition to voting on the regularly scheduled Election Day.

After the election, many states began working on legislation regarding elections. Some of the laws were intended to make some vote-by-mail and early voting options permanent. Others laws were aimed at getting rid of, or at least limiting, the vote-by-mail and early voting options. Measures were introduced that might make voting more or less convenient for voters. Almost all the bills included measures to strengthen election security.

In many states, the debate over election reform and election security has been fiercely partisan. In Kentucky, however, in 2021 the Kentucky General Assembly passed a compromise bill supported by both Republicans and Democrats.

According to a story on National Public Radio, “Before the pandemic, Kentucky had some of the most restrictive election laws in the country. The state allowed people to cast ballots early or by mail only if they had an excuse — like a medical condition, or if they temporarily reside outside their home county.” (Listen to the full story, [“Kentucky Election Reform Effort Gets Bipartisan Backing”](#) at the [npr.org](#) website.)

The bill that was passed will change that. Some of the provisions in the bill are:

- Allowing three days of early voting, including one Saturday;
- Voters will need an excuse to vote by mail (such as age, disability, residing outside the state in the military or in college) but they can request their ballot online;
- Allowing voters to fix their signature if they signed a mail-in ballot incorrectly;
- Counties can create “vote centers” that can be used by any registered voter in the county and drop boxes for absentee voters.

The bill also includes measures to make the voting and ballot counting process more secure.

Understanding exactly what is being proposed in a bill is the first step in making an informed decision about whether you oppose or support the bill, but it is not an easy process. Most people rely on summaries of the bills provided by news media.

The Kentucky Legislative Research Commission maintains a website to provide information about any bills that are introduced in the Kentucky General Assembly. It provides a summary of the bill, any documents related to the bill, and any legislative action taken. It also breaks the bill down into indexed sections.

Visit the Kentucky [Legislative Research Commission website](http://legislature.ky.gov) (legislature.ky.gov) and search for HB 574, an ACT relating to elections. What can you learn about this bill?