

**Free or Reduced Postage for the Return
of Voted Absentee Ballots**

February 7, 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine “the feasibility and advisability of establishing a program under which the United States Postal Service (USPS) shall waive or otherwise reduce the amount of postage applicable to absentee ballots returned by voters in general elections for Federal office”. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 15386. At the time this report was prepared, absentee voting by mail was allowed in all states in the country with 29 of the 50 states allowing no-excuse absentee balloting.

It may be more appropriate to read this study as considering free/reduced postage for returning of ballots without specifically considering whether it is the United States Postal Service that has to absorb the costs of implementing either reduced or free postage. In working with the Postal Service on this study, it was clear from information provided by USPS that prior Congressional authorization for reduced rate funding for certain mailers resulted in a more than \$1 billion shortfall for the USPS in the 1990s. The question for policy makers, then, is to be at least two-fold: is it desirable to have free/reduced postage for mailed ballots? And, if so, how does funding for such a program evolve?

For the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to appropriately determine recommendations to the Congress, the EAC awarded a contract for study of free or reduced postage to include a national survey of voters, as-well-as in-put from voter groups, from the US Postal Service, from election organizations and then peer-reviews by representatives of those groups of the data collected. The overall contract was managed by The Election Center and includes a survey of voters (by Braun Research) and focus group studies (by IFES). For ease of reading, the study is divided into three parts: an Executive Summary integrating all the data including the survey, the focus groups, and expertise of the researchers; a section on the survey itself and the data analysis; and, a section on focus group data.

In order to determine the feasibility and advisability of a change to a free or reduced postage absentee ballot system, a public opinion survey of voting-age adults in the U.S. was conducted to determine the possible effect that a free and/or reduced cost absentee ballot program would have on voter participation. The survey targeted voting-age adults throughout the 50 U.S. states. The consultant developed a survey instrument to gather information on the participants voting behavior to determine whether the implementation of a nationwide program where postage would be paid or discounted for absentee ballot returns would change their voting behavior.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF TOTAL PROJECT:

Cautionary Note: Readers must consider that surveys of voters sometimes lead to conclusions not borne out in actual experience. Historically, voters respond to surveys by the US Census Bureau and other interviews with numbers of those saying they voted at considerably higher percentages than those who actually vote. While the survey instrument for this study attempted to survey actual voters, there was no matching of data of survey respondents with actual voter rolls. Similarly, when asking non-voters why they don't vote, or conversely, if changes were made to voting would they vote, none of the changes made to the process (Election Day as a holiday; weekend voting; no excuse absentee or early voting in person) seems to work to increase voter participation except those states who have expanded voting by mail. It may be too soon to tell if even voting by mail eventually returns participation numbers to historical patterns.

The study of voters included in this survey indicates that 84% of Americans responding reported that they voted in-person at polling places in recent elections on Election Day. Only 13% of the survey respondents indicated that they voted pre-election day.

What the survey data shows and what the focus group studies validated is a mixed message. While voters concluded that free or reduced postage may increase voter participation, the overwhelming majority of voters concluded that it would have little influence on their decision to return a ballot or to vote.

- 30% of Americans surveyed indicated that they would be more likely to vote if postage was provided.
 - 70% of those with disabilities said they would be far more likely to vote if postage were free but 89% of this group would still vote by absentee ballot even if postage were not free
 - But 71% said they would vote anyway if free postage was not available.
- 70% of those with disabilities would like to have the option to vote by mail – and free (not reduced) postage becomes necessary for them since they have limited mobility to find a location selling stamps and have limited income.
- 65% of Americans surveyed favored having the option to vote by mail. [postage rate not considered]
 - 72% of Low Income Voters liked the option (compared to 67% for high income)
 - 65% of African Americans favored the option to vote by mail

- 66% of White Voters favored the option to vote by mail.
- Only 56% of Latino respondents favored the option.
- 25% of Americans responding did not favor an option to vote by mail – and fear of fraud was the main reason
 - 57% feared fraudulent voting
 - 8% said their vote won't count if ballot was mailed
 - Another 6% believed that the USPS would lose their ballot
- Troubling, in consideration of mailed ballots, was that 34% of all voters didn't know if they were eligible to mail in a ballot.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: ISSUES FOR POLICY MAKERS

The survey interviews and focus group interviews revealed that voters believed it would increase the likelihood of mailing a ballot if postage were free. Clearly those with disabilities and to a lesser extent, the elderly, would benefit from free postage. But the mixed message that they would vote anyway if the free postage were not offered makes this a less than clear-cut issue.

TRUST ISSUES: African Americans and Latinos seemed less inclined to trust mailed ballots for a variety of reasons. If a program of providing greater access to mailed ballots and including free postage was developed, there is work to be done to assure some voter groups that their votes would be counted using postal ballots.

FREE VS. REDUCED: What becomes clear in this analysis is that the question is not free or *reduced* postage. If a program is sought, it has to be with free postage. Reduced postage doesn't help target groups: it still leaves them having to find and obtain stamps to place on the ballots. It also becomes an administrative nightmare to manage for the voting process. What happens if it is one or two cents short? Or a nickel short? Or a dime short? Where is the line for what happens? The difficulties exist for the voters, for the election officials, and even for the Postal Service of whether to deliver ballots that don't have enough postage or return them to the voter – and miss the election deadlines. While some may disagree with this assessment, it is our recommendation that the consideration of reduced postage is not a viable option.

TARGET AUDIENCES VS. ALL VOTERS: When considering whether to implement a program of free postage for returning mailed ballots, it seems clear that these efforts are unlikely to work when limited to target audiences; therefore, if free postage is determined by Congress to be desirable, then it must be free to all voters, not selected voters. The administrative difficulties of evaluating “need” or “entitlement” on a voter-by-voter basis

would be overwhelming for any level of government and also for the USPS. Lawsuits would likely become prevalent when voter X is allowed free postage but voter Y is not. Additionally, there appears to be a Constitutional problem of unequal treatment of voters if all voters are not offered the same option.

COST FACTORS: Once the decision is made as to whether free postage would be offered to all voters, then Congress has to determine whether the cost to implement the program is desirable. As long as the consideration of mailed ballots is limited to the scope of Absentee Ballots, then costs are high but not overwhelming. From a local election jurisdiction's standpoint, the increases in administrative practices and procedures are minimal. However, the price of absorbing the postage cost is likely to add considerably to the local jurisdiction's overall election expenses. To be effective it is likely that only Postage Paid Business Reply would be sufficient to assure that postage is not wasted and that ballots are given high postal priority. Jurisdictions are unlikely to purchase pre-canceled stamps or first class stamps and affix them to ballot return envelopes because of the enormous waste on the unreturned ballots.

Volume: What becomes a major decision point is the volume of postage paid mail. If roughly 15% to 20% of today's voters are voting pre-election, what happens if the mailed balloting grows considerably in usage? Clearly, when the rules were changed in California to allow any voter to receive their ballots by mail, those doing so grew at exponential rates. For local California counties, their mailed ballot voters increased dramatically so that now counties have from 35% to almost 60% of voters requesting ballots by mail. If this occurred on a national scale in similar proportions, then the free postage concept could become costly.

Our best estimates at this point are as follows:

Considering that only Federal elections qualify for the program, and that there are rarely more than two Federal elections in the even numbered years (primary election and general election) the cost to implement a program of free postage is likely to have these numbers:

Using the benchmark of 122 million actual voters in 2004 per EAC numbers (highest turnout in 40 years):

Primary elections rarely average more than 20% of the voters and often are less so the expected cost in a primary election would be 20% of 122 million voters in 2004 which equals roughly 24.4 million voters for the primary election. An average printed ballot in the US can weigh up to 3 ounces or more and at current postal rates each piece of mail may cost as much as \$2.01 (at postage rates current on the date of this report) each for a returned ballot (which includes Postage Paid envelope). [These numbers may vary considerably depending on ballot weight which would change the Postal Rate per piece. A 3 or 4 ounce ballot and envelope would be about \$1.31 each plus the cost of the postage paid return envelope for a total of \$2.01 each.] Using the example of a 3 ounce ballot and envelope equals about \$49.1 million if all primary voters voted by mail.

Realistically, only about one fourth of those are likely to vote (under current voting participation) by mail so the estimated cost would be \$12.3 million initially. This number is likely to increase as more voters would be likely to engage in vote by mail.

For the general election that would be a total of 122 million actual voters x \$2.01 for a 3 or 4 ounce ballot and postage paid envelope would be \$245.3 million for all voters. However only one-fourth are likely to use this initially so the cost would be roughly \$61 million in the early years and at current postage rates

SOURCES OF FUNDING:

1. The often mentioned easy target is to assign the cost of funding free postage to the US Postal Service. But the Postal Service is under mandates by Congress to operate without continuous subsidies. This is a Congressional decision but one which the Postal Service is likely to oppose because it leads to larger and a larger unfunded mandate which affects the USPS ability to provide its services at rates where it can recover its costs. USPS has on more than one occasion indicated that it is not its mission to assume costs for socially or congressionally desirable programs.
2. Congressional entitlement or Congressional appropriation: Appropriation may be desirable but in the past when budget priorities shift, funding for reimbursing the cost of election mail disappears. Congress can remedy that situation by providing an entitlement program on election mail costs. Even at maximum costs, this is unlikely to be an overwhelming budget item for the Federal government.
3. Leave it to state and local governments to fund the increases. While this would not be a major item for the Federal government, it can be an overwhelming requirement for local budgets. If it is unfunded, then it does become another mandate of the Federal government that state and local governments are likely to oppose.

These are the major considerations related to free postage for mailed ballots. The next section of this report will present the findings from a nationally representative survey of the 50 U. S. States.

THE SURVEY

Methodology for the Survey: Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Braun Research Inc.¹ among a nationwide sample of 1,205 adults, 18 years of age or older, from August 7-30, 2007. These data were collected by using a random digit dial (RDD) methodology to generate random samples of telephone households in the United States. With each telephone household, one respondent was selected by choosing the one with the most recent birthday.

These data were weighted using demographic weighting parameters derived from the U.S. Census of 2000. The results were weighted for age, race, education, and region. For results based on the total sample (n = 1205), one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points.

¹ Braun Research, Inc., is a privately held marketing and public opinion research firm headquartered in Princeton, NJ

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

In August of 2007, a majority of Americans surveyed reported being registered to vote. American voters who were surveyed continued to prefer in-person voting as opposed to voting by mail as a majority of voters report voting in-person at the polls in the 2004 and 2006 Federal elections. As fits historical voting patterns, more older voters than younger voters reported casting a vote in either of the 2004 and 2006 Federal elections. While most voters reported heading to their polling place on Election Day to cast their vote, regional differences emerge between those who voted in-person and those that voted by mail in 2004 and 2006. Voters in the Pacific and Mountain West¹ were more likely to have voted by mail in the previous Federal elections than those in the North-east or Mid-Atlantic States of the U.S. Individuals with disabilities were also among those taking advantage of early voting in both the 2004 and 2006 Federal elections. Pre-election voters who voted by mailing in an absentee ballot overwhelmingly believed that having this option facilitated their voting process. However, the survey findings also indicated a need for additional information on states' policies for absentee ballots, as nearly one-third of registered voters did not know if they were currently eligible to vote by absentee ballot in their state.

While most Americans surveyed have chosen polling place voting over pre-election voting options in previous elections, survey results indicated that Americans do support having the option to choose how their vote are cast—by mail, early in-person voting, or Election Day in the polling place.

Of significance, is the finding that while three in 10 Americans said they would be more likely to vote if they had the option to vote by mail with free postage—these respondents would still choose the convenience of voting by mail even if they are required to pay for postage. Moreover, nearly twice as many reported that having the option to vote by mail without paying postage would not affect their voting behavior.

Indeed, survey findings indicated that while free postage is an attractive option for some, it may only have a minimal effect on voting behavior. What prevented some Americans from casting a vote by mail was primarily fear of fraud. The survey data indicated that a system of free postage -- compounded with other measures to enhance awareness of states' policies and improve the reliability and security of the overall absentee voting process -- was likely to generate a more positive impact on voting behavior than a stand alone system of free postage.

¹ The regional breakdowns were as follows:

Pacific West: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington

Mountain West: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming

Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Southeast: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas

Mid-Atlantic: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, DC, West Virginia

Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont

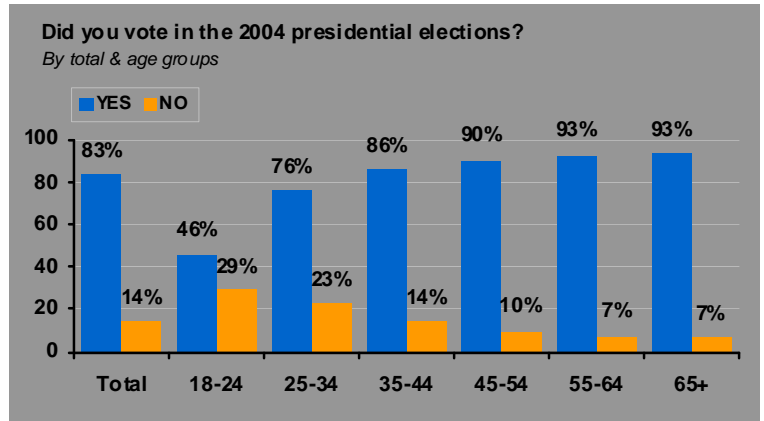
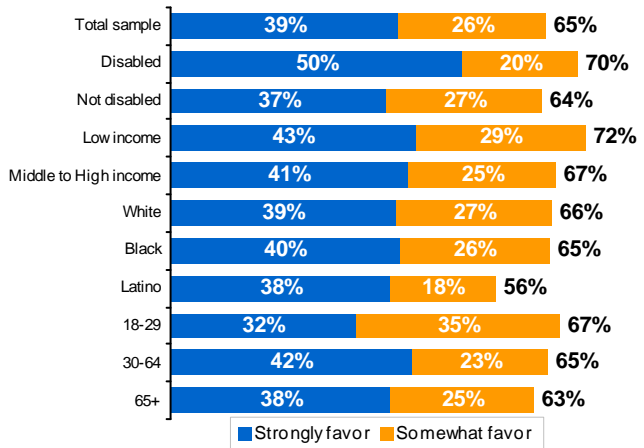
III. PROGRAM EFFECT

Most Americans surveyed like to be given the option of casting their vote by mail

Survey findings essentially indicated that Americans welcome the opportunity of choosing whether to vote in person or via absentee ballots. About two-thirds of respondents (65%) said they strongly or somewhat favored allowing people to choose to vote either by mail before Election Day or in a booth on the day of elections while only a quarter (25%) of respondents were opposed.

Of the minority of people with disabilities², most said they were in favor. Nearly seven in ten (70%) of individuals with disabilities said they preferred having the choice to cast their vote by mail. Their strong preference was reflected in the fact that half of them said they “strongly favor” this option.

Percent of respondents "very or somewhat" favoring the option to choose how to cast their vote
By selected demographics



Low-income respondents said they were also more likely to support this option with 72% saying they favored the opportunity to choose. The corresponding proportion among higher-income respondents stands at a slightly lower 67%.

In terms of races, although all groups have a majority of individuals who liked the option to choose how the vote was cast, Latino respondents were the least likely to have favored this option (56% compared to 66% for white respondents and 65% for African-Americans).

Among age groups, the proportion of younger respondents (18-29) who favored the option to choose was 67%; this was slightly higher than the corresponding proportion for the 30-64 age group (65%) and for those 65 and over (63%) but these differences were not statistically significant.

Fear of fraud was the main reason why certain respondents oppose voting by mail

Meanwhile, 21% considered voting by mail to be in contradiction with the tradition of voting which “should be taken seriously” as they argued. Voting by mail, in their view,

² See Appendix A for breakdown of sample demographics

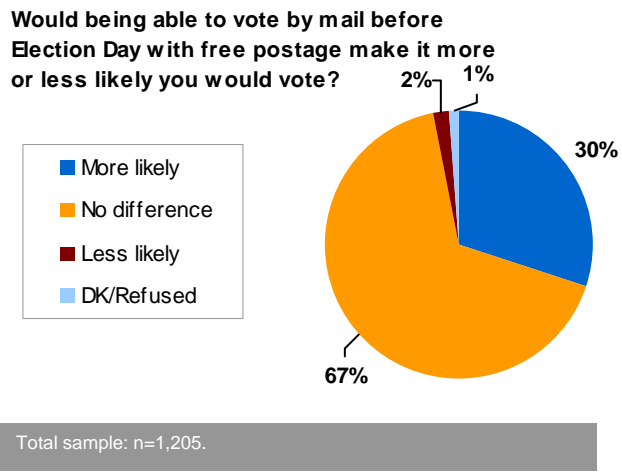
encouraged apathy among voters, noting that “Americans are lazy if they vote by mail.” Some eight percent of respondents expressed concerns about whether ballots voted by mail were counted towards the final results. They argued that they needed proof that votes casted by mail were accounted for or counted. Lack of trust in the U.S. Postal Service was another reason why respondents opposed voting by mail: Six percent of respondents said they feared ballots might be lost in the mail.

Can you tell me the main reason why you oppose people voting by mail before Election Day?	
Fraud/ Voting by mail permits opportunities for fraud	57%
Voting is a tradition and should be taken seriously/ It's our duty	21%
Vote will not count if vote by mail/ Want proof of vote	8%
No trust in the USPS/ Ballots lost in mail	6%
Oppose voting by mail unless there is a valid excuse (disabled, out-of-town)	3%
Past history (example: Florida) makes me oppose voting by mail/ Election system not reliable	1%
Other	13%
Don't know / Refused	6%

Asked only of respondents who said they are opposed to voting by mail: n=297
Total exceeds 100%. Respondents were allowed to give multiple responses.

A sizable share of Americans expected the option of free postage to increase their ability to vote

When asked whether having the option to vote in-person or by mail before Election Day *without* having to pay postage would increase their ability to vote, roughly three in 10 Americans expected the option of free postage to make it more likely they would vote. Yet, two-thirds of Americans (67%) believed it makes no difference in their ability to vote. Young Americans aged 18-29 were the most likely to expect free postage to increase their tendency to vote as 40% of them said free postage makes it “more likely” they would vote. In comparison, only 17% of those over 65 believed that free postage would make them more likely to vote.



Individuals with disabilities and those without share a similar opinion on the option of being able to vote by mail without paying postage. Indeed, individuals with disabilities did not demonstrate a greater likelihood of voting as a result of free postage than those without disabilities. The results indicated that individuals with disabilities and those without had a roughly equal likelihood of voting by mail if free postage was available. Similarly, low-income and middle-to high income Americans also demonstrated a

roughly equal likelihood of voting if they had the option to vote by mail without paying postage.

When the 30% who said that the option of free postage would increase their likelihood of voting were probed further on this issue, a strong majority (70%) said it would be “a lot more likely” that they would vote with fewer (29%) who said it was only “somewhat more likely.” Across the age groups, there was overwhelming agreement among those who said free postage would increase their likelihood of voting; a majority of voters agreed that free postage could make them “a lot more likely” to vote.

Voting by mail with free postage deemed convenient

Of those who said voting by mail with free postage would increase their likelihood of voting, about half (48%) attribute this to the convenience and flexibility of this option. Within the same context, a quarter of respondents said this option would help them avoid the hassle of finding transportation to polling places, getting there on time and fighting crowds at the polls. Some 23% of respondents said voting by mail would make the process much faster than if they have to do so in person.

Suppose you were able to mail in your ballot before Election Day but were required to pay postage, which of these are most likely?									
	Total	Low-income	Middle to high income	Disabled	Not disabled	White	Black	Male	Female
Vote by mail anyway	71%	66%	74%	89%	68%	74%	56%	71%	71%
Vote in Person	19%	17%	19%	10%	20%	16%	37%	23%	15%
Chance won't be able to vote	9%	16%	6%	0%	10%	9%	6%	6%	12%
Don't know / Refused	1%	1%	1%	-	2%	2%	-	-	2%

Asked only of those who said voting by mail with free postage would make them more likely to vote. Total n=338; Low-income n=76; Middle to high-income n=220; Disabled n=49; Not disabled n=285; White n=257; Black n=27; Latino n=29; Male n=160; Female n=178.
Red circles indicate a statistically significant difference between the results (with observed significance (P-value) at the 0.05 level).

IF POSTAGE WAS NOT FREE—THE MAJORITY SAID THEY WOULD VOTE BY MAIL ANYWAY.

When those who expect the option of free postage to increase their ability to vote were asked whether they would still vote by mail if required to pay the postage seven in 10 (71%) respondents said they would still vote by mail versus two in ten (19%) who declare they would rather vote in-person in this case. Respondents with disabilities were the most likely to say they would vote by mail anyway as confirmed by a sweeping majority (89%). Meanwhile, African-Americans were much more likely to say they

would resort to voting in person (37%) than white respondents (16%). A majority of voters across all age groups said they would vote by mail anyway if they were required to pay postage.

Nine percent of respondents noted there was a chance they would not be able to vote anyway. Low-income respondents were much more likely to make this assumption than more affluent respondents (16% versus 6%). Similarly, twice as many females expected not to be able to vote than males (12% versus 6%).

When asked why they would still vote by mail if postage was not free, 46% of respondents reiterated that voting by mail was convenient. Some 15% noted that voting by mail would help them save time, explaining that they were “too busy to vote at the polls.” For some respondents (12%), even if they have to pay the postage fee, voting by mail would still be cheaper than the cost they would incur for gas or transportation to get to the polling places. Similarly, 11% of respondents argue that voting by mail helped them avoid the hassle of getting to the polls and waiting in long queues. Meanwhile, nine percent of respondents considered that voting by mail, even when postage was not free, remained a good alternative for sick, disabled or elderly voters as-well-as low-income citizens or those stuck in adverse weather conditions.

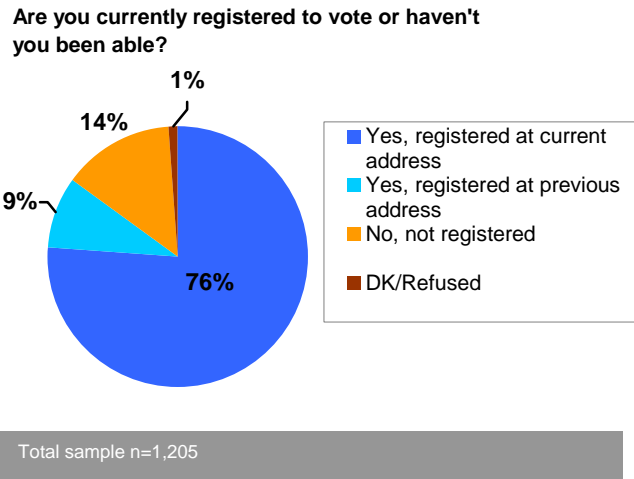
These results suggest that while a sizeable percentage of Americans surveyed said that having the option to vote by mail without having to pay postage would increase their likelihood of voting, these respondents were not deterred from voting by mail if required to pay for postage. Furthermore, a system of free postage may not be a major factor that propels individuals to vote, but rather it may be the option to vote by mail regardless of a postage fee that may encourage some to vote. Essentially, a system of free postage may only have minimal impact on voting behavior.

IV. VOTER INFORMATION

Most Americans said they were registered to vote

The survey also collected data on other electoral information including voter registration, previous voting history, and methods of voting in previous elections.

In August of 2007, over eight in 10 (85%) Americans reported being currently registered to vote, with the majority of them saying they were registered to vote at a current address rather than a previous address (76% vs. 9%). Of these nine percent of Americans who said they were registered at a previous address, nearly all (98%) were aware of which state they were currently registered to vote in. In comparison, over one in 10 (14%) said they were not registered to vote.



Income and age were factors when it comes to voter registration, as older and higher income Americans were more likely to have reported being registered to vote. Americans over the age of 65 were slightly more likely to say they were registered to vote than those under 65 (90% vs. 84%). Similarly, middle to higher income Americans were more likely to have reported being registered than low-income individuals (92% vs. 71%).

In addition to low-income individuals and young people, Latinos were also less likely to have been registered to vote. Almost three in 10 Latinos (28%) report they were not registered to vote, more than twice the percentage of whites (13%) and over three times the percentage of African-Americans (8%).

Half of unregistered voters report never being registered

Of the 14% of Americans surveyed who were not registered to vote, over half (56%) said that they had never been registered to vote. A sizeable percentage (43%) said they were previously registered.

Have you previously been registered to vote, or have you never been registered?	
Previously registered	43%
Never registered	56%
Don't know / Refused	1%
n = 125	
+Asked only of respondents who said they were not registered to vote	

A registration gap clearly exists between younger and older Americans. Almost eight in 10 (76%) 18 to 29 year-olds had never been registered to vote, significantly more than the proportion of 30 to 64 year-olds (43%) and those over 65 (40%). When examining differences between the races and voter registration, Latinos were more likely to never

have been registered to vote in comparison to white respondents (77% vs. 46%). Roughly similar percentages of low-income and middle to high income respondents have reported never being registered.

Reasons for not registering included lack of time, dislike of candidates and disinterest in politics

When the 14% of Americans who were not registered to vote were asked why it was the case, no single dominant reason emerged. Almost two in 10 (17%) cited their busy schedules prevented them from being registered to vote, while another 13% claimed that they were just not interested or did not care enough to register to vote. Some Americans said they were not registered to vote due to their feelings of disillusionment with politics and voting. Roughly one in 10 (8%) said they were not registered to vote because they felt their vote does not count, while slightly more (14%) said it was because they dislike the candidates and were disenchanted with politics.

What would you say is the MAIN reason you are currently not registered to vote?	
Too busy/ No time/ Travel too much	17%
Don't like any of the candidates/ Disenchanted with politics	14%
Not interested/ Do not care/ Not paying attention	13%
Just became eligible/ Turned 18/ Became U.S. citizen	11%
Recently moved/ Live in two places	9%
My vote doesn't count/ Don't believe in voting	8%
Felony/ On parole	5%
Not enough information on registration process/ Delay in registration process	3%
Disabled/ Health issues	3%
Other	21%
Don't know / Refused	4%
n = 125	
Total exceeds 100%. Respondents were allowed to give multiple responses.	
Asked only of respondents who said they were not registered to vote	

Other Americans had not had a chance to vote, with 11% having only recently becoming eligible to vote and somewhat fewer (9%) who have only moved and have yet to register.

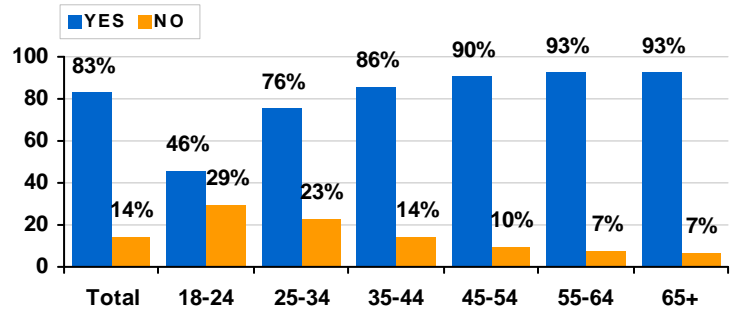
A Majority of registered voters reported casting ballots in 2004 and 2006

Of those survey respondents who indicated they were registered (currently or previously): In 2004, 83% reported voting in the presidential election while only 14% reported that they did not cast a vote. In 2006, only 68% of registered voters reported voting in the election for either a Senator or Congressperson, while 30% said they did not cast a vote in the 2006 election.

Younger citizens and Latinos had the lowest voting rates in 2004 presidential elections.

Older respondents (aged 65 or older) had a high voter turnout with an overwhelming proportion (93%) saying they were able to vote in the 2004 presidential elections. Voting rates seem to be proportional to age: Younger respondents 18-24 had the lowest voting rates (46%). This was partly driven by the fact that a quarter of them had not turned 18 at the time of the previous elections. Yet, the positive relationship between age and ability to vote seems to hold across age groups: As ages increase, the tendency to vote grows as well: 93% of the 55-64 reported having voted in the previous elections, followed by 90% for the 45-54, 86% for the 35-44, and 76% for the 25-34.

Did you vote in the 2004 presidential elections?
By total & age groups



Asked only of registered voters: n=1,133; 18-24 n=74; 25-34 n=190; 35-44 n=232; 45-54 n=236; 55-64 n=144; 65+ n=216

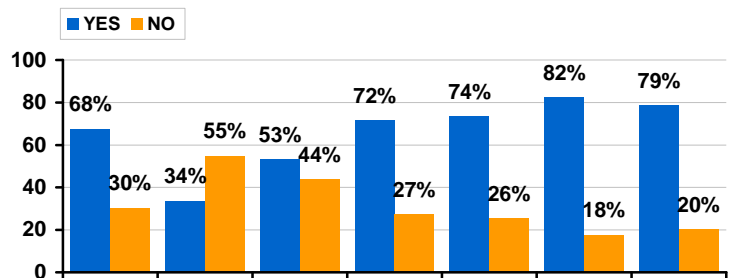
In terms of race categories, Latino respondents had the lowest voting rates for the previous elections (70%) versus a much higher rate among white respondents (85%).

The income effect also influences voting patterns with 69% of respondents in the low-income category reporting having voted in the previous elections compared to a much higher proportion (89%) for the remaining respondents.

Young voters still not at polls in 2006

Differences in the profiles of voters and non-voters in the 2006 congressional elections were similar to those characterizing voters and non-voters in the presidential elections. Voters in 2006 were also more likely to be older and with middle to high incomes. The difference in voting patterns among age groups was dramatic: Registered voters over 65 were more than twice as likely to have voted compared to the 18-24 age group (79% vs. 34%). Likewise, more middle to high income registered voters voted for a Senator of

Did you vote in the 2006 congressional elections?
By total & age groups



Asked only of registered voters: n=1,133; 18-24 n=74; 25-34 n=190; 35-44 n=232; 45-54 n=236; 55-64 n=144; 65+ n=216

Congressperson in 2006 than those with an income near or below the poverty line (74% vs. 50%).

Most 2004 and 2006 election voters went in-person to polls on Election Day to vote

On whether they voted in person at the polling place or before Election Day in the 2004 presidential election, 84% of respondents reported voting in person at the polling place versus 13% who voted before Election Day at an early voting site or with an absentee ballot. Meanwhile, only 2% said they dropped off their absentee ballot at the polls on Election Day.

Again in the 2006 congressional election, a majority (80%) of voters reported going in-person to their polling place on Election Day to cast their ballot. Only a minority of voters (17%) cast ballots before Election Day—that was at an early voting site or by absentee ballot. Very few (3%) voluntarily reported dropping off their absentee ballot at the polls on Election Day.

Do you remember if you voted BEFORE Election Day, either at an early voting site or with an absentee ballot, OR did you vote in-person at your polling place ON Election Day?		
	2004 presidential election	2006 congressional election
In person at polling place on Election Day	84%	80%
Before Election Day – Early Voting Site/Absentee	13%	17%
Dropped off absentee ballot at polls on Election Day [volunteered]	2%	3%
Don't know / Refused	2%	1%

2004 presidential election n = 991±; 2006 congressional election n = 830±;
 +Asked only of current or previously registered voters who voted in the 2004 presidential election
 ± Asked only of current or previously registered voters who voted in the 2006 congressional election

Voters with disabilities more likely to take advantage of early voting in 2004 and 2006

In the 2004 presidential election voters with disabilities were more likely to have voted before the day of elections (21%). Similarly in the 2006 congressional election, voters with disabilities were more likely to take advantage of early voting as opposed to voters without disabilities. While majorities of both groups reported going to the polls on Election Day in 2004 and 2006, voters with disabilities were much more likely to have reported voting before Election Day in 2004 (21% vs. 12%) and twice as likely in 2006 (31% vs. 15%).

In each of the Federal elections, roughly similar proportions of voters under 65 and over 65 reported voting in-person at their polling place on Election Day. The survey found little difference in the percentages of low-income voters and middle to high income voters who went to the polling place on Election Day to cast a ballot in the 2004 presidential election or the 2006 congressional election.

In both the 2004 and 2006 elections, regional differences emerged between those Americans who voted at a polling place on Election Day and those who voted before

Election Day. Voters in western U.S. states were much more likely to have voted before Election Day than those in the eastern part of the U.S. Almost one-third of Pacific West (31%) and Mountain West (30%) voters stayed home on Election Day in the 2004 presidential elections, and rather cast their votes before Election Day at early voting sites or by absentee ballot. Voters in the east remained committed to the tradition of voting in-person on Election Day, as only a handful voted before Election Day in the North-East (6%) and Mid-Atlantic (5%). This pattern was repeated in the 2006 congressional election: voters in western states were much more likely to have taken advantage of absentee voting. A sizeable percentage of voters in the Pacific West (41%) and Mountain West (32%) regions voted by absentee ballots while much lower proportions of voters in the North-East (4%) and Mid-Atlantic (5%) regions voted by absentee ballot.

Percentage of early voters choosing absentee ballots on the rise

When early voters were asked whether they voted by mailing in an absentee ballot or by casting their vote in-person at an early voting sight, over half (54%) of the early voters in the 2004 presidential election said they mailed in an absentee ballot. Only slightly fewer (42%) said they voted in person at an early voting site in the 2004 Federal election.

And did you vote BEFORE Election Day in person at an early voting site or did you mail in your absentee ballot?		
	2004 presidential election	2006 congressional election
Mailed in absentee ballot	54%	63%
In-person at an early voting site	42%	35%
Dropped off absentee ballot at polls on Election Day	4%	2%
Don't know / Refused	-	-

2004 presidential election n = 147*; 2006 congressional election n = 151**
 * Asked only of current or previously registered voters who voted before Election Day in the 2004 presidential election
 ** Asked only of current or previously registered voters who voted before Election Day by mailing in an absentee ballot in the 2006 congressional election

The percentage of early voters who mailed in their absentee ballot increased in the 2006 congressional election. Of the minority of voters who said they cast their ballot before Election Day, nearly two-thirds (63%) of these early voters said they voted by mailing in their absentee ballot compared to only one-third (35%) of the early voters who went in-person to an early voting site to cast their ballot. *These numbers may be affected by circumstances: every state allows some form of mailed ballot while, at the time this report was written, far fewer states allowed pre-election in-person voting (Early Voting).*

Young people and those over 65 prefer mailing their absentee ballot

Early voters over 65 and those between the ages of 18 to 29 preferred mailing in an absentee ballot to voting at an early voting site compared to those between the ages of 30 and 64. Specifically, in 2004 seven in 10 early voters aged 18 to 29 and those over 65 voted by absentee ballot. This percentage increased slightly in 2006 as eight in 10 early voters aged 18 to 29 and those over 65 reported mailing in an absentee ballot rather than going to an early voting site.

In the 2006 congressional election, African-American voters were more prevalent at early voting sites than those of other races. African-Americans who chose to vote early were more than twice as likely to vote at an early voting site (75%) than white early voters (32%), and three times as likely as Latino early voters (26%).

Voting by mail before Election Day tends to facilitate the voting process

Of early voters who voted by mail in the 2004 presidential elections, many said that casting their vote by mail made their ability to vote much easier. Indeed, two-thirds of respondents who voted by mail said it made their ability to vote “a lot easier” and eight percent said it became “somewhat easier,” bringing the proportion of those who find the process easier to almost three-quarters (74%). Public sentiment was similar among those who voted by mailing in an absentee ballot in the 2006 congressional

Did being able to vote by MAIL before Election Day make it a lot easier, somewhat easier, somewhat harder, a lot harder, or did it make no difference in your ability to vote?		
	2004 presidential election	2006 congressio nal election
A lot easier	67%	71%
Somewhat easier	8%	7%
Somewhat harder	0%	0%
A lot harder	0%	0%
No difference in ability to vote	26%	22%
Don't know / Refused	0%	0%

2004 presidential election n = 79*; 2006 congressional election n =93**
 *Asked only of current or previously registered voters who voted before Election Day mailing in an absentee ballot in the 2004 presidential election
 ** Asked only of current or previously registered voters who voted before Election Day by mailing in an absentee ballot in the 2006 congressional election

election. Roughly seven in 10 Americans who voted by mailing in an absentee ballot in 2006 (71%) reported that being able to vote by mail made it a lot easier to vote, with another 7% who said that voting by mail made it somewhat easier for them. However, in the 2004 presidential election and in the 2006 congressional election, a sizeable percentage (25% in 2004; 22% in 2006) said voting by mail made no difference in their ability vote.

One-third of registered voters didn't know if they were eligible to vote by absentee ballot

When registered voters were asked if they knew whether or not they would be eligible to vote by absentee ballot in their state,

Every state have different regulations for voting by absentee ballot. If there were to be an election next week, do you know whether or not you would be eligible to vote by absentee ballot in your state?	
Yes, eligible	54%
No, not eligible	12%
Don't know / Refused	34%

n = 1074
 Asked only of respondents who said they were registered to vote

roughly one-third (34%) reported being unaware of whether or not they can vote by absentee ballot in their state. Just over half (54%) believed they were eligible to vote by absentee ballot in their state, and only (12%) said they did not believe they were eligible.

In comparing awareness of regulations in states that do not require an excuse to vote by absentee ballot and those that do, there was no difference in awareness of eligibility to vote by absentee ballot as roughly one-third of voters in both categories were unaware of their states' regulations. However, what was somewhat perplexing was the 51% of

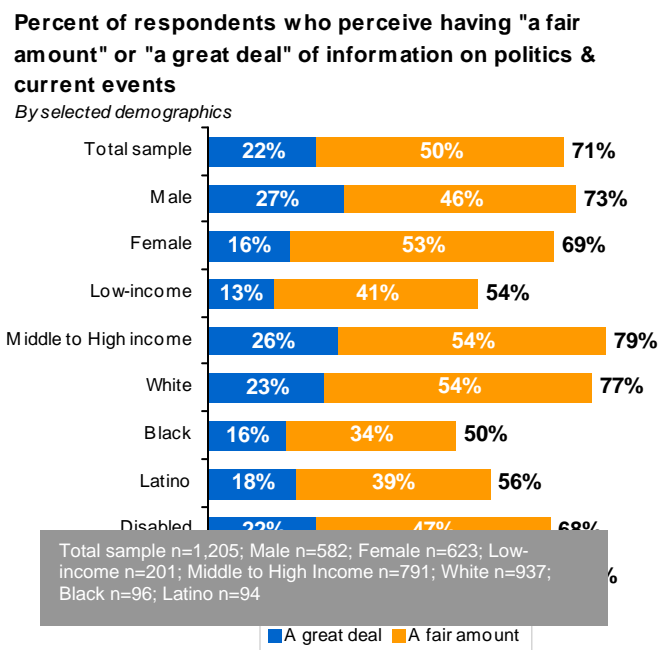
registered voters in states where an excuse was required who believe they were eligible to vote by absentee ballot. While it does depend on the states, these voters in excuse states were not automatically eligible to vote by absentee but instead must meet certain criteria to be eligible to vote by absentee ballot. Therefore, while some of the voters may fulfill their states' criteria and thus be eligible to vote by absentee ballot, the results indicate that some voters wrongly assumed that they were eligible to vote by absentee. Overall, these results suggest that there was a lack of information available to registered voters regarding their states' policies on absentee voting. Indeed, more information was needed for voters on their states' regulations on absentee ballot voting.

People's information about politics and current events varies significantly among demographics

The majority of respondents (71%) perceived that they have a fair amount or a great deal of information about politics and current events. In terms of age groups, younger respondents were the least likely to say this: only 51% of those aged 18-29 felt they have a fair amount or a great deal of information on these matters compared to 77% for those in the 30-64 age group and 74% for those aged 65 or more.

Similarly, only 54% of respondents in the low-income category said they have a fair amount or a great deal of information compared to 79% for remaining respondents.

White respondents were the most likely to have reported having information about politics and current events compared to Latinos or African-Americans (77% vs. 56% and 50%, respectively.)



Appendix A: Breakdown of Sample Demographics

Breakdown of Sample Demographics	
Total Sample n = 1,205 Voting-age-adults	
Male	48%
Female	52%
Individuals with disabilities	
Individuals with disabilities	14%
Individuals without disabilities	85%
Low-income individuals	
Low-income individuals	22%
Middle to high income individuals	60%
18 to 24 years old	
18 to 24 years old	13%
25 to 34 years old	
25 to 34 years old	19%
35 to 44 years old	
35 to 44 years old	21%
45 to 54 years old	
45 to 54 years old	18%
55 to 64 years old	
55 to 64 years old	12%
65 and older	
65 and older	17%

FOCUS GROUPS

I. INTRODUCTION

As part of the effort to determine the effect of free or reduced postage on absentee voting by mail, a series of focus groups were held throughout the country.

Three groups each were held with key populations thought likely to benefit from increased use of absentee ballots: Citizens with Disabilities, Senior Citizens, and Citizens in Low-income Communities. These focus groups took place over a period of four weeks in the following locations:

All of the focus groups were conducted with the use of a moderator's guide that covered the same list of issues. The research team moderated the focus groups and the average time for

	Location³	Number of Participants
Low-income	Washington, DC Metro Area	5
	Adrian, MI	9
	Memphis, TN	6
Senior Citizens	Sacramento, CA	5
	Oxford, MS	8
	Colorado Springs, CO	8
Individuals with Disabilities	Washington, DC Metro Area	10
	Chico, CA	8
	Detroit, MI	8

each group was approximately one hour. Participants for the focus groups were recruited by local organizations serving the three communities of interest, under directions provided by the research team. The team then performed the final step in the recruitment process by interviewing interested persons over the telephone and making final selections of participants for the focus group sessions.

The focus groups took place in facilities provided by the local organizations, or in public facilities available for use. All focus groups were held in secure rooms, where both a video-recorder and an audio-recorder were utilized to record all focus groups. These recordings were used for analysis and archival purposes only. In addition to the moderator, an assistant took notes and assisted with logistics during the group. One or two observers representing the Contractor and U.S. Postal Service (USPS) were also present as observers during each group.

³ Appendix A provides demographic information on focus group participants. Appendix B provides demographic information on focus group locations.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Note of Caution: To utilize this study and its findings, a note of caution must be offered here and throughout the study: focus groups allow researchers to narrowly target an issue and to probe more in-depth about the perceptions and reactions of participants. Readers must remember that such a study is a “snapshot in time” for the participants. The comments and conclusions may or may not be representative of the subsets of voters studied.

The targeted focus group study of low income, elderly and/or individuals with disabilities on the issue of voting through the mail and whether the postage for such an effort should be reduced or free, was structured in a manner that may give answers that would not be representative of all voters – or perhaps of even greater numbers of the groups studied. Therefore, readers should be cautioned and reminded that this study deals with small subsets of voters talking through an issue that they may not have given great consideration prior to gathering for the focus groups. While the results are valuable in a sense of discovery, time and money did not permit the researchers to do enough groups to compare extensively the responses of these participants to a large sample of such voter subsets. The study does present *findings* of the participants in these focus groups; whether the findings are sufficient to draw policy conclusions is where caution must be exercised.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the feasibility and advisability of establishing a program under which the USPS shall waive or otherwise reduce the amount of postage applicable to absentee ballots returned by voters in general elections for Federal office. It may be more appropriate to read this study as considering free/reduced postage for returning of ballots without specifically considering whether it is the United States Postal Service that has to absorb the costs of implementing either reduced or free postage. In working with the Postal Service on this study, it is clear from information provided by USPS that prior Congressional authorization for reduced rate funding for certain mailers resulted in a more than \$1 billion shortfall for the USPS in the 1990s. According to postal officials, Congress promised to pay for the program but has yet to fully fund the costs incurred. The question for policy makers, then, has to be at least two-fold: is it desirable to have free/reduced postage for mailed ballots? And, if so, how does funding for such a program evolve?

At the time of this report, absentee voting by mail was allowed in all states in the country with 29 of the 50 states allowing no-excuse absentee balloting. Two of the six states or territories in which these focus groups were conducted allowed no-excuse absentee balloting (California and Colorado), while the other four required a valid excuse for voting absentee (District of Columbia, Michigan, Mississippi, and Tennessee).

In order to determine the feasibility and advisability of a change to a free or reduced postage absentee ballot system, the focus groups were designed to first understand the current usage of absentee voting by mail among three target populations and gauge opinions on absentee voting in general. These overall opinions on absentee voting by

mail form important background information in understanding opinions about free or reduced return postage and help foster a greater understanding of the feasibility and advisability of the proposed program.

Key Findings: The focus group findings suggested that, generally, focus group participants in all three population groups (seniors, voters with disabilities, low-income voters) were supportive of the concept of free or reduced postage absentee balloting and believed that it can be beneficial in providing greater access to some members of their particular population. Most participants in the focus groups indicated that even though they themselves were not likely to use this option, it could help their peers who find it difficult to get to a polling location to vote for one reason or another. Most participants who supported free or reduced postage were adamant, however, that the postage should be free rather than reduced. This was expressed primarily as a matter of convenience rather than cost.

At the same time, many of the participants had concerns about the absentee voting process itself that must be addressed by electoral authorities in order to make absentee balloting in general, and free or reduced postage absentee balloting in particular, a viable voting option for large numbers of Americans. These concerns revolved around the issues of ballot integrity and the efficiency of postal services. The concerns expressed about absentee balloting are also indicative of larger concerns about the voting process in general.

The focus groups sessions did identify a number of obstacles to voting that can be addressed through greater use of absentee balloting, particularly for voters with disabilities and low-income voters. The focus group findings suggested that an important limitation to greater use of absentee ballots was a lack of information on the availability of this method of voting or a lack of understanding of the requirements to vote absentee. The focus group findings also suggested that many people may not understand that measures taken by electoral authorities to safeguard the integrity of the absentee ballot. Greater information on how to access absentee balloting, as-well-as information on the measures used to ensure the integrity of an absentee ballot could be positive factors in increasing usage of absentee ballots, and in turn increasing the viability of a free or reduced postage absentee ballot program. The next section provides key findings from the focus group discussions, followed by chapters containing detailed findings on the issues addressed in the focus group. The findings start with a discussion of general issues related to voting, followed by findings from a discussion of absentee ballots and impact of a possible program of free or reduced postage on voting choices, and end with a discussion of other concerns related to voting and the election process.

A. Main Obstacles and Concerns with Voting

- Most of the participants in the focus groups were regular voters, but fewer had used absentee ballots in the past. Most of the participants found the in-person voting process to be generally pleasant. Still, many participants in the people with

disabilities groups and in the low-income groups raised concerns about specific aspects of the election process.

- Key concerns raised about the election process included:
 - Not being able to vote due to work conflicts, mostly expressed by low-income voters
 - Transportation issues in getting to polling locations, primarily mentioned by voters with disabilities and seniors
 - Inconvenience of standing in line or confusion about which line to stand in, primarily mentioned by voters with disabilities
 - Confusion and lack of information about where to vote, all groups
 - Physical obstacles faced by people with disabilities, including pain or problems with standing in line; difficulty navigating steep ramps, narrow doors, steps, weather and similar impediments at the polling location
 - Anxiety or lack of understanding of the ballot, the election process and general political issues faced by people with mental disabilities
 - Lack of voter education about alternative voting methods if one faces any of these obstacles, all groups
 - Confusion and lack of information about political issues and candidates in the election, all groups
 - Lack of voter education about election process in general, and specifically about issues or candidates being voted upon, all groups

- Various solutions to these issues were raised in the groups, including:
 - Organized transportation to polling locations
 - Special polling locations for people with disabilities
 - Polling locations in nursing homes
 - Voting by mail
 - Voting online
 - Clearer notification of when, where, and how (that was, an explanation of voting options) to vote via mass mailings or by telephone; arranged by the government or via political campaign canvassing calls
 - Lines designated for people with disabilities
 - Larger print and better contrast on ballots

B. Attitudes toward Absentee Voting By Mail

- Most of the participants in the focus groups had reservations about absentee voting by mail either regarding their personal use of such a voting method or regarding its general use. These concerns fell into the following categories:
 - Establishment of voter identity – Concerns about whether the intended voter actually fills out the ballot out and sends it in
 - Fraud – Undue influence from individuals in filling out ballot, general fraud of ballots
 - Concerns about Postal Service – Will it be delivered to right place in adequate time

- Early deadlines – Deadlines for submittal of absentee ballots are too early, have to send in ballot before key events take place in campaign
- Lack of assurance that absentee ballots votes would be counted - How are absentee ballots counted, are they treated differently from other ballots
- Despite these concerns, the majority of respondents were supportive of the use of absentee voting by mail by those in their population group who needed it (i.e. those with a specific excuse such as voters with limited mobility, voters with disabilities, voters over a certain age and voters out of town, etc.).
- Also despite these concerns, the vast majority of respondents were supportive of the idea of free postage to increase financial and logistical convenience to voters. Reduced postage was not as highly supported as many participants felt that postage should be free because of convenience this provides. Cost was not as much a factor in expressing support for free postage.
- In addition, many respondents who had not used or were not aware of the absentee voting by mail option expressed interest in using it in the future.
- Some of those with concerns were interested in using the voting by mail option if their concerns were addressed.
- Participants in the focus groups suggested various ways in which the absentee balloting process could be improved to make it easier to access and also to lend confidence in integrity of the process:
 - A system for verification that the voter submitting the absentee ballot was the one who filled it out, possibly through visits of electoral or postal officials to homes
 - A certified mail system for sending absentee ballots so that the voter has proof that they sent the ballot, and confirmation when it was received by electoral authorities
 - A transparent system for counting absentee ballots
 - Greater information on procedures for obtaining, filling out, and submitting absentee ballots

C. Impact of Free or Reduced Postage Absentee Ballots on Obstacles and Voting Choices

- Most of the focus group participants who had traditionally voted at a polling location said that they would continue to do so because that was the way they prefer. Some, however, who had little prior knowledge of absentee balloting, suggested that they would consider this option in the future.
- Several of the obstacles and concerns about voting noted above could be helped by greater use of absentee voting by mail. Yet many participants, among regular voters and most nonvoters were unaware of its availability. Others who either were aware

of it or had used it previously noted they had not use it at all or only infrequently because of various concerns with voting by mail.

- Regarding participants' personal voting choices, most did not feel free or reduced postage would have an impact; however, low-income groups were more likely to say it would have an impact. Further, at least some respondents in each group noted there were those in their communities for whom such a change would make a difference in voting choices.
- That is, generally, most of the participants were interested in the added convenience of free or reduced postage; however, most current voters did not think it would be a deciding factor for them in which method to use to vote.
 - Many of the participants who are current voters were either committed to going to the polls in person, or overly concerned about absentee ballots, and would not be more encouraged to change if free or reduced postage was introduced.
 - Other current voters who use or have used absentee voting by mail would appreciate the added convenience of free or reduced postage, but this would not be a deciding factor for them.

The combination of improvements in the voting by mail process, increased information about it, and the introduction of free postage garnered the most positive responses from the participants to say they would be more likely to vote by mail.

Recommendations⁴: The findings from the focus groups indicated that participants in the groups with all three populations were generally supportive of a system of free or reduced postage absentee balloting by mail. The findings also suggested that free or reduced postage absentee balloting could play a small role in increasing access to voting and voter turnout if this system were to become an option for voters, and especially for voters in the populations that were targeted by the focus groups. This finding was tempered by the fact that most participants had significant concerns about absentee balloting in general that must be addressed in order for free or reduced postage absentee balloting by mail to be viable. Recommendations for absentee balloting in general and free or reduced postage absentee balloting in particular are detailed below.

One specific recommendation for a system of a free or reduced postage system for absentee balloting was that a system of free postage was more preferable than a system of reduced postage for absentee balloting by mail. Many of the participants in the focus groups stressed that the attractiveness of free postage derives not from the cost factor, but from the convenience factor. They believed that if one does not have to attend to obtaining the correct postage for mailing in an absentee ballot, it would increase convenience and make voters more likely to use absentee balloting. This convenience factor was particularly important for voters who may suffer from limited mobility.

⁴ It should be noted that the cost of implementing free or reduced absentee balloting by mail was not considered during the focus group discussions, and that the recommendations below do not take this factor into account. The recommendations also do not take account the costs of other programs recommended in this section. It is expected that electoral officials nationwide will weigh the costs and benefits of the recommended programs in their specific geographic areas.

Conversely, many participants felt that if voters had to first determine and obtain appropriate postage, even if it was reduced postage, it may cause inconvenience that would not make reduced postage absentee ballot voting an attractive option for voters.

While the focus group findings suggested that free, and not reduced, postage absentee balloting would be an attractive voting option for the groups represented in the focus groups, it would not be a viable, or even advisable option until specific concerns about absentee balloting by mail were addressed, either through specific measures taken to address these concerns or through informing voters about steps already in place to address these concerns.

Based on the focus group findings, it is recommended that the following concerns about absentee ballot by mail be addressed before a free postage absentee balloting system is considered:

- A system for verification that the voter submitting the absentee ballot is the voter to whom it was mailed and for whom it was intended; i.e. that no fraud is taking place. This system should address concerns about identity fraud as-well-as improper influence by those assisting absentee voters to fill out their ballots. This was the primary concern about absentee balloting by mail expressed by the majority of focus group participants, and was the single most cited factor undermining confidence in the absentee ballot system.
- A certified mail system for sending absentee ballots should be established so that the voter has proof (some kind of receipt) that they sent the ballot, and also receives confirmation when it was received by electoral authorities. This confirmation could come in different ways, for example in Sacramento; there is already a hotline to call to confirm that your ballot has been received. Or it could be a mail tracking system, such as that used by packaging services, where voters would have a unique ballot number to follow on-line. This recommendation stems from repeated concerns expressed by participants in many of the focus groups about the reliability of the postal service in delivering the ballots in adequate time and to the right location.
- More information should be provided to voters on how absentee ballots are handled and counted after they are sent to electoral authorities by voters. Many participants in the focus groups were uncomfortable with the fact that absentee ballots are counted separately from ballots cast at a polling station, and were uncertain how these ballots are handled by electoral authorities. Greater transparency in the absentee ballot handling procedures may lead to greater confidence in the process.

The recommendations above address several key concerns raised by focus group participants about absentee ballot by mail. One clear finding from the focus group was that many voters may have had these concerns about absentee balloting because they lacked much information on the procedure for, and availability of, absentee balloting by mail.

In order to combat this general lack of information about absentee balloting by mail, one overriding recommendation for electoral authorities is to provide more information to voters on the requirements for obtaining an absentee ballot, and the procedures for obtaining, filling out, and submitting the absentee ballot. The focus group findings indicated that many of the participants lacked information on absentee ballots, and greater awareness of this method of voting may lead to greater use in the future.

The voter outreach on absentee balloting could be pursued through the use of mass media, voter information packets sent out with voter registration materials and other elections materials, and voter outreach for specific target populations. In the focus groups, members of the target populations identified specific ways that their peers could effectively be given information about absentee balloting. The recommended methods of information dissemination for each group are:

Senior Voters: Resource centers, service organizations, or community senior centers that serve seniors, homebound seniors, or nursing homes should be used to disseminate information.

Low Income Voters: Community groups and churches were specifically mentioned, as were resource or community centers that serve those in low-income communities.

Voters with disabilities: Resource centers, service organizations, or community centers that serve people with disabilities should be used to disseminate information. In addition, large-print and easily readable materials should be printed for voters with disabilities. Information on general regulations as-well-as specific information on services or options in the election process for people with disabilities should be issued.

In their voter outreach efforts on absentee balloting by mail, it is recommended that electoral authorities try to address how absentee balloting can help voters address specific difficulties faced in being able to vote at polling stations. This is a particular recommendation for electoral officials in states with no-excuse absentee balloting by mail, and where absentee balloting can ease access to voting. For example, voters with disabilities or senior citizens who find it difficult to get to a polling station due to transportation problems could be helped immensely by voting through absentee ballots. Voters with learning disabilities who might find it difficult to absorb a ballot at a polling station might be better served voting through absentee ballot where they could take time with the ballot. The flexibility that absentee ballots provide to voters to address these types of issues should be emphasized in voter outreach efforts on absentee ballots.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. General Attitudes and Experiences with Voting

i. Comparison of Groups

In order to begin the discussion, participants in all of the focus groups were asked to describe their opinions on the voting experience the last time they voted in a Federal presidential or congressional election. Most of the participants in the focus groups were regular voters, and most preferred to go to the polls to vote in elections. There were significant differences, however, in the experience of voters with disabilities when voting in comparison to the experiences of senior citizens and low-income voters. The focus group discussions indicated that voters with disabilities were more likely to cite physical and other impediments in the voting process that make voting more difficult for them, than was the case for the other two groups of voters.

In general, senior citizens were less likely to report serious problems with their access to voting than low-income citizens or citizens with disabilities. They were also more likely to take advantage of absentee voting than low-income citizens, although few used absentee voting by mail, rather they dropped their ballots off at a polling location or courthouse. Low-income voters were more likely to have reported challenges with obtaining information on the election process, and this lack of information lead to confusion on issues like the identification of proper polling place location, particularly for those who had moved. However, both low-income voters and voters with disabilities noted that sometimes they remained in the area, but the polling location was changed and they did not receive or were not aware of any notice given about the closure or new location. Low-income respondents were also generally less likely having been aware of the absentee ballot option in comparison to senior citizens.

Voters with disabilities differed from the other two groups of voters in reporting more serious challenges to their participation in the election process. They reported physical impediments which make it onerous for them to vote in polling locations, such as: Ramps that are too steep and make it difficult to access the polling location, or doors and polling booths not properly positioned for easy access by voters with disabilities. Respondents were not fully aware of all the election procedures or services available to people with disabilities and as more informed participants spoke about these options, others noted they want election authorities to provide more information on election procedures for voters with disabilities specifically. Although many of the participants in the focus groups with voters with disabilities in Detroit, MI, and Chico, CA, were previously aware of absentee balloting, some had only recently learned of it and their level of information and understanding about procedural issues such as location of polling places or political issues such as who was running and what was at stake in the election was low.

The opinions of these three types of voters on the general election process are detailed below.

ii. Voters with Disabilities

Opinions of the participants in the three groups with voters with disabilities suggested that this group of voters face obstacles to voting that were both related and unrelated to the disabilities from which they suffer. Most of the participants in the focus groups with people with disabilities had physical disabilities, were regular voters and most of them preferred to vote in person at polling locations. While the voting experience of most participants in focus groups with voters with disabilities were generally positive, their description of their voting experience at polling locations did point out barriers that they faced when voting at the polls. There were two particular types of problem areas that voters with disabilities said they faced when they go to the polls to vote: Those of a physical nature and those brought about by a lack of information on election procedures.

Physical Impediments: One particular impediment mentioned by voters with disabilities, especially those confined to wheelchairs, was the physical accessibility to polling places. The problems arose not from the fact that polling locations had not been altered or designed to be accessible to people with disabilities, but rather from the fact that the measures that have been taken were inadequate. This was particularly the case for older polling locations that had been retrofitted to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). *See* 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.

One common complaint from those who were wheelchair-bound was that ramps that lead to polling locations were sometimes too steep or otherwise not easy to navigate. Doors to polling locations were also often too small to allow wheelchairs to pass through easily. Some participants also mentioned that voting booths could be too high for those who are wheelchair-bound.

There were other complaints about physical challenges to voting at polling locations. Some participants with disabilities noted that lines could often be long and standing in them can caused pain or discomfort to those with specific types of disabilities. Some participants noted that blind or visually impaired voters could find it difficult to navigate multiple lines at polling locations. Others noted that in a crowded polling location, the general confusion could be a difficult impediment for those who have physical or mental disabilities.

Traveling to the polling location itself was another complication, which voters with disabilities often face, as many do not drive. Most had to find transportation to the polling location through the help of an acquaintance or family member. Those who used public transportation sometimes found it difficult to find the routes and transportation options that would take them to polling locations. Participants in the Washington, DC, area focus group for voters with disabilities mentioned the use of curbside assistance for voters with disabilities as being a positive program, but did not feel that it was implemented effectively. They complained of having to wait outside the polling location for long periods before a member of the polling location staff came to take them inside the station.

“I registered to vote and wanted to vote, but [I] had issues, at a polling place in Virginia which is not accessible [for individuals with] disabilities. In my case, when I wanted to go I had someone who took me there, but there is a big flight of stairs that I had to take [at the polling place]...But because of my [disability] I couldn’t walk up those stairs...and no one could assist me in getting up to the polling place... People don’t understand a lot about [individuals with disabilities], people at voting places really don’t understand as much as they said.”

[Washington, DC, M, 36-45]

“The booths aren’t low enough for people in wheelchairs.”

[Detroit, MI, M, 36-45]

“There are problems getting in lines. They could organize lines better with ropes—especially for the blind—or they could have designated lines for people with disabilities.”

[Detroit, MI, F, 46-55]

“Access and waiting for a long time and going up ramps... I can’t sit for a long time or stand for a long time. And I felt that [the polling staff] should have come out and asked if we wanted seating, or if we wanted to come in early [to vote]. They don’t really care about you if you are handicap or if you have any problems. And if you don’t look handicap they really don’t care.” [Washington, DC, TG, 46-55]

Information Challenges: In addition to the physical challenges that voters with disabilities faced when going to vote at polling locations, they also expressed concerns about understanding and awareness of various election issues. Some of these concerns were related to the nature of participants’ disabilities and some are unrelated.

For example, one participant noted that before he had a computer, with audio to read to him, and which he could control despite his physical disability, he was not able to access information about election procedures or political issues during the election. Other participants with mental disabilities noted that anxiety and/or difficulty reading made it difficult for them to access information or to understand information when they did have access to it.

Generally, participants with disabilities shared a concern mentioned in other populations that if they had moved since a previous election and then tried to go vote to their old polling location, that they did not know that they had to vote in a different polling location, and that it was not easy to obtain this information. Additionally, blind voters or those with impaired vision expressed concern that unfamiliar polling places were not easy for voters in their position to find; they felt sometimes that they did not receive advanced notice of changes, or clear explanations of locations.

Voters with disabilities also noted problems accessing information on procedures or services meant to assist them. One such instance mentioned was by a blind participant who noted that she thought she had to take someone along to assist her with voting, but later found out a polling location official could have helped her vote. There were also specific complaints about ballot design and how it affects voters with disabilities. Several participants in the Chico, CA focus group expressed concerns that ballots and/or sample ballots should be simplified so that voters with learning disabilities were better able to understand the ballots.

“It is hard for me to read the ballot [because of vision impairment] so I needed assistance. It took me a long time to vote.” [Detroit, MI, F, 66+]

“Last election is the first time they sent me an absentee ballot and when I got it in the mail I didn’t know what it was. Usually when I get mail and I don’t know what it is I just set it on the table. I set it on the table and forgot it was there.” [Detroit, MI, M, 46-55]

“I needed a lot of help. I can’t read so I asked a friend for help. I think it would be helpful to have one [voting] place for people with disabilities.” [Chico, CA, F, 46-55]

“I couldn’t get [to polling location,] I could not find a ride. Getting a ride is the biggest difficulty.” [Washington, DC, F, 46-55]

“They said that there were people out there to help you vote, but I’ve never seen it. They [poll workers] just hand you your ballot and that’s it. A lot of people don’t know if they can ask to have that help.” [Chico, CA, F, 46-55]

“In 2004, [I was] living in a nursing home... and [the nursing home] got me to the polls, but it wasn’t handicap accessible. [The polling staff] did not come outside to the van. And I didn’t know how to work the machines, and nobody told me, so I didn’t get to vote.” [Washington, DC, M, 46-55]

Participants in the three focus groups with voters with disabilities were more likely, than participants in the other focus groups, to voice examples of elections where they wanted to vote but could not do so for some reason. As would be expected, voters with disabilities were more likely to mention a lack of transportation for not voting than others. As mentioned earlier, a lack of information on the correct polling location in which to vote was also a reason for being able to vote in an election.

One or two participants in each of the three focus groups with voters with disabilities had voted absentee in the past. The fact that there was not an increase in participation through absentee balloting among voters with disabilities was partly due to lack of information about the option, as a significant number of voters in each of the groups were not aware that this option was available. However, several people in each group chose not to vote absentee at all, or very often, due to their commitment to going to the polls both to

assert their independence as-well-as for the experience of voting in person (the latter being a similar point made by some people in all groups).

“I didn’t even know you could [vote by mail]. I’m doing a project with Independence on Northern Virginia; we are dealing with candidates, talking to candidates and trying to get the candidates to come to something we’re doing. I was looking on the electoral board website and it talked about absentee ballots. I saw that the other day, I didn’t know it at all.” [Washington, DC, M, 18-25]

“I didn’t know about absentee ballots in the last election.” [Chico, CA, F, 46-55]

iii. Senior Citizens

In contrast to voters with disabilities, participants in the senior citizen focus group generally had positive opinions on the voting experience, and most participants did not report any problems with the voting process. There was a mix of voting at the polling booth and voting absentee by seniors in all three groups. Participants in the Colorado Springs, CO, and Sacramento, CA, focus groups were more likely to have voted absentee at some point in their voting history than the group in Oxford, MS. The groups in Oxford, MS, and Colorado Springs, CO, both have positive impressions of new voting machines that had been used in the last Federal elections and felt that the machines made voting easier.

At least two participants in each of the seniors’ focus groups had used absentee voting as a method to vote in the last Federal election. In most of these cases, however, they had submitted their absentee ballot at a polling location or at a courthouse rather than mailing it in. Some of the seniors have also taken advantage of early voting for elections.

Few senior citizens reported cases of wanting to vote, but not being able to do so. One person in the Oxford, MS, focus group reported that he had tried to vote absentee because he was going to be out of town on Election Day, but he could not because at that time this was not a reason why one could vote absentee. Illness was another reason cited for not voting.

“I used to go to the polls every time, until somebody mentioned absentee.”
[Sacramento, CA, M, 66+]

“I vote absentee, but I drop mine off. It is a painless process walking in, putting it in the envelope, and that’s all there is to it.” [Sacramento, CA, M, 66+]

“I go to the polling station. I felt like it’s more nebulous when you put it in the mailbox... Plus, I like the experience. I prefer doing it in person.”
[Sacramento, CA, F, 56-65]

“I always vote in person. I’m too disorganized to vote absentee. I’d never be able to find it on time to get it in.” [Sacramento, CA, F, 56-65]

“I don’t trust any of the machines.” [Colorado Springs, CO, M, 66+]

“The voting machines are easy to use, fast...”
(Colorado Springs, CO, F, 66+)

“None of us ever know if we vote by writing, in a lever machine like we used to, an electronic machine, if we punch holes, we never know if the little man in the box counting these things are counting properly. I think I’d trust a machine that has more than one person checking how the machine works rather than have a person counting them.” [Colorado Springs, CO, M, 66+]

iv. Low-Income Voters

Most participants in these groups were regular voters, similar to participants in other groups. Those who vote with some regularity were overall pleased with the election process. Participants in the Memphis, TN, groups mentioned the use of voting machines were a particularly positive experience. Among those who did not vote regularly, most did not do so out of dissatisfaction with or apathy toward the political process. Others mentioned work schedule conflicts, an unwillingness to put up with the lines and other inconveniences associated with voting.

Among those who did vote regularly, several issues were listed as being minor inconveniences with voting. One was that long lines at polling locations can be discouraging, and if the lines are not adequately identified, this caused confusion on Election Day. The participants referred to multiple lines at polling locations being confusing and not enough direction was being provided by the election staff to clarify confusion. For this reason, a participant in Memphis, TN, noted that she liked to take advantage of early voting to avoid the lines. Another issue frequently brought up in all three focus groups was the change of polling locations if a person changes residence between elections. Many participants felt that this causes confusion among voters who did not understand that their polling location changes if they move between elections.

The confusion about proper polling place was related to the larger issue of voter education about election procedures. Participants in all three of groups with low-income populations were concerned about the lack of information, and people in the Memphis, TN, group were especially concerned that not enough information was provided to voters about pre-voting day issues such as: Registration and polling location. They felt that greater efforts should be made in voter education. There was also discussion of confusion about polling location in the Washington, DC, group, indicating a need for voter education on this issue. All the participants in the Memphis, TN, group was of the opinion that technology should be utilized more for voter education.

Most participants were not aware of the absentee ballot option for voting.

“I did early voting. I like early voting. I didn’t like the lines...they can be long.”
[Memphis, TN, F, 35-45]

“I have never voted. I figured one way or another...there are things I couldn’t change. I was never interested in it.”
[Adrian, MI, M, 26-35]

“I couldn’t get time off work to go vote—had too much work. If polls were open later it would have helped.” [Washington, DC, M, 46-55]

“I think a lot more people would vote if they could do it through the mail.”
[Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

“I voted. I found it fairly easy. I went later in the day... It is really easy...There are quite a few volunteers there to help.” [Adrian, MI, F, 26-35]

“There were some lines that were kind of confusing. There were two long lines and I didn’t know which one to go into so they pointed it out to me.” [Adrian, MI, M, 46-55]

“I didn’t drive, for one, so no transportation. Also, I work...if you get something in the mail, fill it out, and send it in, a lot more people might vote.” [Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

B. Attitudes toward Absentee Voting By Mail

i. Comparison of Groups

Participants in all of the focus groups were asked at length to discuss their opinions on absentee voting by mail. Findings from the discussions revealed several commonalities of opinions, as-well-as differences in opinions between the groups. One thing all groups had in common was a set of concerns about the implications for voting integrity of absentee voting by mail. While the groups differed in their emphasis on these concerns, three key concerns could be identified through the groups:

Identity Issues: Participants in all of the groups were concerned that, to the best of their knowledge, absentee voting does not allow for adequate verification that the person who signs the ballot was, in fact the person who filled out the ballot. Participants in the focus groups referred to instances of double voting, dead people voting, and other such instances to stress those systems of absentee voting should have some procedure to ensure that the person mailing the ballot in was a legitimate voter and the same legitimate voter to whom the ballot was sent by election officials.

Fraud: Beyond the issue of identity, participants were also concerned about fraud in the absentee voting process; both before the ballot were sent by voters to election offices and after it received in election offices. Participants in most of the groups were concerned

that someone other than the voter could exercise undue influence when an absentee voting was filled out, e.g. Undue influence on those with learning or other disabilities. Participants in many of the groups were also concerned about whether adequate systems were in place to ensure that absentee ballots were adequately handled and counted by election officials. This concern was especially acute among African American participants in the low-income community focus groups.

Lack of Trust in Postal Service: This concern was not expressed by all groups. Participants were concerned whether the postal service could be relied upon to deliver the absentee ballots to voter and back to election officials in time for the vote to count. This concern was especially highlighted in the focus groups in urban areas where previous experience with the postal service lead to acute concerns about its reliability.

Even with these concerns, however, participants in all of the groups believed that absentee voting by mail does lead to greater access to voting for specific populations such as people with disabilities, those sick or infirm and those with transportation problems, etc. As would be expected, participants in the groups of people with disabilities were generally supportive of expanding absentee voting, although those in the Washington, DC, group did not share this view. Participants in all three low-income population groups, while having the concerns highlighted above, believed that absentee voting could help to increase access to voting among their peers. This was especially the case for free or reduced postage absentee voting, though much more strongly for free postage than reduced postage.

ii. Voters with Disabilities

The three groups for voters with disabilities differed in important ways in their overall attitudes to absentee voting by mail. While the participants in the Detroit, MI, and Chico, CA groups were generally supportive of absentee voting, almost all the participants in the Washington, DC, group were against the idea of expanding the availability of absentee balloting beyond those who had a need to use it such as people with disabilities or the infirmed.

The participants in the Washington, DC, group had various concerns about absentee voting that make them question the wide availability of this voting option. One of their primary concerns was whether their vote would count if they voted by absentee ballot. One person in the group mentioned specifically that she was not sure her vote counted when she voted at the polling location, so she would be even less sure in the case of absentee ballots. This point of view was also mentioned in other groups, though not to the extent that it was in the Washington, DC and Memphis, TN groups.

Participants in the Washington, DC, group were also concerned about fraud in the absentee ballot process, specifically with voter identity and how election officials could ensure that the registered voter who was supposed to receive the ballot was actually the person filling out and signing the ballot. They also worried about undue influence on voters who were voting through absentee balloting. Many participants also expressed

concerns about the postal service being able to deliver the mail on time. Participants in this group felt that absentee voting by mail should only be made available to those who need it.

The participants in the other two groups, while generally supportive of absentee voting by mail, also shared some of the concerns expressed in the Washington, DC, group. The security of the ballot was a concern for participants in both the Chico, CA, and Detroit, MI, groups, as was the concern about the ballot being counted. Participants in the Detroit, MI, group also expressed concerns that the absentee ballot, particularly for voters with disabilities, should be clearer with larger fonts and better contrast than ballots at the polling locations. Participants in the Chico, CA, group were concerned that the deadlines to submit absentee ballots were too early, which would cause voters to make decisions without considering events in the last days of the campaign. Regarding whether absentee votes are accurately handled and counted by election officials, some participants in the Detroit, MI, group were somewhat concerned about their votes being counted in general, but not particularly more so in the case of absentee balloting.

On the positive aspects of absentee voting by mail, participants in the Detroit, MI, group stressed that it would give a voter more time to review the ballot and eliminate the issue of transportation to the polling location. Participants in both the Chico, CA, and Detroit, MI, groups believed that absentee balloting would give more options of voting to those interested and that it could aid in increasing turnout for elections. The majority of participants in both these groups believed that absentee voting by mail should be open to everyone.

“It is more convenient to do absentee ballots—some places are not wheelchair accessible.” [Detroit, MI, M, 36-45]

“There are a lot of people with disabilities who could have someone come to their home and help them read through things and explain things so they can comprehend.”
[Chico, CA, F, 46-55]

“I use absentee a lot instead, but I think [for] most of the disabled, it’s more of an independent thing. It’s like, ‘I can go out, I feel good, I don’t have to depend on somebody to mail me something because I can’t get out.’ Mine [problem] is the transportation thing.” [Chico, CA, M, 26-35]

“It [absentee ballots] beats going to the poll and standing in the huge lines.”
[Detroit, MI, F, 46-55]

“I can either go to the poll or I can stay home, but as long as I am able I like going to the poll.” [Detroit, MI, F, 66+]

“I think it’s a good experience to have absentee ballots for those that can’t get out like they should...but I think that if you are healthy and are able to do it, it is

good to get out and hear what other people are saying about the candidates...If you are an able-bodied person and can get to the polls, then why not do it?" [Detroit, MI, F, 26-35]

"I think that a lot of us with disabilities it stops us from going to the polls...I think that it should be open, because you never know what might come up that might hinder you from voting." [Detroit, MI, M, 36-45]

"I think that absentee be available to everyone might make people vote that don't vote...People that said 'I just got off work,' or 'The line is too long.' I think that if you request it [absentee ballot] then you should be able to get it." [Detroit, MI, M, 66+]

iii. Senior Citizens

Participants in the senior citizen focus groups also voiced many of the opinions that people with disabilities voiced when talking about absentee voting by mail. In general, while seniors see positives in making absentee voting by mail available to specific populations, they also had many concerns about this method of voting.

The concerns about absentee voting by mail were similar across all three groups with senior citizens. The most critical group was that in Colorado Springs, CO; the most positive group was in Sacramento, CA. The most often-cited concern was of voter identification, and how election officials could verify that the voter was the one who actually mails in the ballot. Fraud was another concern as participants in the Colorado Springs, CO, group wondered how one could be sure that double voting not take place because of absentee ballots. Participants in all the groups also questioned whether election officials properly handled ballots, although this concern was extended to both absentee and polling location ballots.

The performance of the postal service was another concern as many participants, particularly in the Colorado Springs, CO, and Sacramento, CA, groups, did not feel that the postal service was reliable and they could not be sure if ballots would reach the appropriate destination in time. Some participants believed a system like Federal Express (FedEx) where the absentee ballot was tracked or a mail system with receipt for absentee ballots can help to offset this concern. One participant in the Sacramento, CA, group was also concerned that the amount of postage required was not displayed on the absentee ballot and were frustrated by the inconvenience of going to the post office to establish the correct amount of postage needed.

Several participants in the Oxford, MS, focus group, and one in Sacramento, CA, also wondered how election officials could establish whether someone who filled out an absentee ballot was of a sound state of mind.

The early deadline for filing of absentee ballots was another concern in the Sacramento, CA, and Colorado Springs, CO, groups. Many participants in these groups, similar to

participants in the Chico, CA, group of people with disabilities, felt that the deadline for receipt of ballots was too early and a few participants who have voted absentee in the past said that they walked their ballot to the polling location because they did not want to vote too early before the campaign was finished.

Participants also had positive evaluations of absentee ballots and many had voted through absentee ballot in the past. One participant mentioned that she liked to have the time to review the ballot and that absentee ballots allowed her to do that. Many participants also mentioned that absentee ballots allow access to voting for some in the population who may not otherwise be able to vote.

Most of the participants in the Oxford, MS, and Colorado Springs, CO, groups believed that absentee voting by mail should only be available for the groups such as people with disabilities or those that are sick who would not otherwise be able to go to polling locations to vote. Participants in the Sacramento, CA, group, on the other hand, felt that absentee balloting by mail should be available to everyone.

Regarding the overall question of voter security versus increasing the numbers of people who can vote, participants in Oxford, MS, and Colorado Springs, CO, were split, but lean toward security. The Sacramento, CA, group's attitude toward this balance was illustrated by their concern over seniors who were immobile and/or in nursing homes. They felt that in most of these cases the seniors would need assistance understanding and filling out the ballots, which opens the door for improperly influencing immobile voters or other fraud. Participants stressed that election officials should seek a proper balance between access and security in these cases. Most participants in this group also felt that voting in general should be made easier for seniors in nursing homes by placing polling locations in nursing homes.

"My concern is the source of identity of the voter when voting by mail."
[Oxford, MS, F, 66+]

"A lot of political mail comes in after you have to mail in your ballot. It seems the candidates play to poll voters more than absentee voters." [Sacramento, F, 66+]

"I see many opportunities for fraud when voting by mail. I am thinking of undue influence by someone in the home, in the nursing home...I just think there is potential for corruption there." [Oxford, MS, F, 66+]

"One thing that disturbed me is that the envelope is off size and I know that the post office requires extra postage, but it doesn't say so... So I wondered, 'How many of those, if you don't have the right postage, don't get to [the polling station]?'"
[Sacramento, CA, F, 66+]

iv. Low-Income Voters

As was the case with participants in senior citizen focus groups, participants in low-income focus groups have significant concerns about absentee voting by mail. But participants in these focus groups were generally more supportive of greater availability of absentee voting.

Participants in the Adrian, MI, group tended to be less vocal about concerns regarding absentee voting than participants in the Washington, DC, and Memphis, TN, groups. The participants in the Adrian, MI, group placed more emphasis on access to and ease of voting, and a secondary emphasis on security concerns, which led them to consider absentee voting by mail a valuable option for voters.

Participants in the Washington, DC, group were much more negative about absentee voting by mail than the participants in the other two groups. Their opinions centered chiefly on concerns about fraud in the absentee ballot process, both before it was sent to election offices and after it was received by the election officials.

The Memphis, TN, group had identity and security concerns, as-well-as concerns about the postal service. The security concerns revolved around whether votes sent in by absentee ballot would be counted, a concern also expressed in the Washington, DC, group. This concern was prompted largely by concerns that even when voting in-person at a polling location, votes might not be counted.

The primary concerns expressed in all three groups were of identity confirmation. Participants in the Adrian, MI, and Memphis, TN, groups were especially specific in their concerns, stating that deceased people had voted in elections in their areas and this was likely to occur with a process, such as: Absentee voting, unless some sort of identity verification was built into it. Participants in these two groups also have concerns about the reliability of the postal service and would like to have some sort of receipt system built into the process so that voters have confirmation that their ballot was sent to the election offices and received by the election officials.

Participants in the Adrian, MI, group were most enthusiastic about making absentee voting by mail open to all voters. One reason given for this in this particular group was the high cost of gasoline and the impact absentee balloting could have in counteracting this cost. Participants in the other two groups were more reluctant to endorse this, but did think absentee voting can help voters with disabilities, those who were sick or lacking transportation. Several participants in the Memphis, TN, group felt that instead of absentee voting by mail, greater efforts should be placed on using technology such as: E-mail and the internet to make voting easier for people.

“If you send a mail-in ballot, someone take you mail out, votes for you and sends it back and you never learn [about it].” [Memphis, TN, F, 18-25]

“In Memphis our post office is not the best, so I still have a problem with putting my faith in their hands.” [Memphis, TN, M, 18-25]

“As long as you’re registered to vote you should be eligible to get something like that [absentee ballot] in the mail.” [Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

“Who is to say that the absentee ballot makes it or that the ballot is being counted?” [Washington, DC, M, 46-55]

“It seems the state spends money on all sorts of other stuff so I don’t see why they couldn’t send some pieces of paper out to everybody.” [Adrian, MI, M, 26-35]

“A whole lot of things get lost in the mail.” [Adrian, MI, M, 46-55]

“Falsifying things, fraud. I think it would be really easy to do [through absentee voting].” [Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

C. Impact of Free or Reduced Postage on Obstacles and Voting Choices

i. Comparison of Groups

While most participants in all of the focus groups were supportive of free or reduced postage absentee voting by mail because it would help increase access to voting, there was mixed support for the idea of expanding absentee voting to all voters. Most of the participants in the groups with voters with disabilities believed that absentee voting should be extended to all voters. Out of the three senior citizen groups, only in the Sacramento, CA, group did a majority of participants say absentee voting should be expanded to all. Among the groups in low-income communities, only participants in the Adrian, MI, focus group felt that absentee voting should be expanded to all voters.

ii. Voters with Disabilities

Participants in all three groups of people with disabilities thought that if absentee voting by mail were available, it should be made available with free or reduced postage, particularly free postage. For several participants, this was not a matter of cost, but rather convenience because voters would not have to ensure that they had the correct postage on hand. This was a particular advantage for voters with disabilities who would not have to leave home to get correct postage. Most participants also agreed that free or reduced postage for absentee voting would have a positive impact on voting by voters with disabilities.

“I think the absentee ballot option is a good option. Also, I know they have raised the stamp prices recently so if it came postage paid it would help...A lot of times

people might not have a stamp or can't get one in time and that might also hinder the voting process.” [Detroit, MI, M, 36-45]

“It is convenient to not have to put stamps on it.” [Detroit, MI, F, 66+]

Participants in the Detroit, MI, group mentioned the use of Public Service Announcement (PSAs), circulars and other voter education tactics to inform the public about free or reduced postage absentee voting by mail. Specific materials for voters with disabilities were also mentioned.

*“[They should give us information] Like when they call us on the phone to let us know [in the campaigns].”
[Detroit, MI, F, 46-55]*

*“All the mass media they already use to get information to us...radio, TV.”
[Detroit, MI, M, 36-45]*

“On the return envelopes it should said, ‘Postage paid’ [to inform people clearly].” [Detroit, MI, F, 36-45]

iii. Senior Citizens

Most participants in the seniors' groups supported the idea of free or reduced postage absentee voting by mail. Many also felt that this would help seniors who are infirm be more able to vote in elections in their area. Most did not believe, however, that general turnout would increase as a result of free or reduced postage absentee voting by mail. However, the Sacramento, CA, group felt that free postage absentee voting by mail could be of special benefit to seniors who are not mobile in nursing homes or other locations.

As with voters with disabilities, participants in the senior citizens focus groups would use PSAs and mass marketing materials to inform the public about free or reduced postage absentee voting by mail. Participants in the Oxford, MS, and Colorado Springs, CO, groups also mentioned the use of local community centers or service organizations for seniors or the homebound which can help get the word out to the communities they serve.

*“If you really want to encourage voting, they should make postage free.”
[Sacramento, CA, F, 66+]*

“We get mail all the time from our senators, telling us what a good job they're doing, and so forth. As long as we get that mail, there's no reason they couldn't include something in there about voting.” [Colorado Springs, CO, M, 66+]

“There's always notification asking if you want it [absentee ballot]...Just put it [the message] in there.” [Colorado Springs, CO, M, 66+]

“Newspaper, radio, TV...all your media [would get the message out about absentees].” [Colorado Springs, CO, M, 66+]

iv. LowIncome Voters

Participants in all three focus groups with citizens in low-income communities were supportive of the idea of free or reduced postage absentee voting by mail, and were more enthusiastic about free postage than the other two population groups. Even participants in the Washington, DC, group who were otherwise skeptical of absentee voting were enthusiastic about free or reduced postage and thought it would increase turnout among people they know. Nonvoters in the Adrian, MI, group indicated that they would be much more likely to vote if they could do so by mail, and even more so if postage was free. All of the participants in the Memphis, TN, group thought that free or reduced postage absentee ballot by mail can increase voting by acquaintances who normally did not vote.

Participants in these groups echoed other groups in stressing the role of PSAs and other media in letting voters know about free or reduced absentee voting by mail. Participants also mentioned that community groups and churches should also be used to let voters know about absentee voting. They also stressed the need to reach young voters through college campus information sessions.

“If you can go ahead and take [voting] out of the way and mail it in and not have to worry about it, it would be a lot easier and I think a lot of those who don’t vote...would start voting, if that option is available.” [Memphis, TN, F, 18-25]

“I thought you always had to have an excuse [to vote by mail].” [Adrian, MI, F, 46-55]

“Free postage would help. Absentee ballot would get people out to vote—people who can’t get there postage should be free...Not everyone would vote, but it would increase it.” [Washington, DC, M, 46-55]

“It would help to have an advertisement sent home.” [Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

“Free postage...more information in general [would make the process easier].” [Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

“I think it [absentee voting] should be widely encouraged.” [Washington, DC, M, 46-55]

“I really think you could get more votes in if you could get them in by the mail.” [Adrian, MI, F, 46-55]

“If the postage is free [it would help] since the [postage] rate keeps going up.” [Adrian, MI, F, 46-55]

“If they send me one free, then yeah I’ll send it back.” [Adrian, MI, M, 26-35]

“I’d vote if they’d send it to me.” [Adrian, MI, M, 46-55]

“Right now I don’t vote, but if it [a ballot] came in the mail [and the postage is free] I would.” [Adrian, MI, F, 36-45]

“Free postage, yeah, [it would help].” [Adrian, MI, F, 46-55]

“None of my friends vote...I would say it would help a lot if it [a ballot] came in the mail and with free postage.” [Adrian, MI, M, 26-35]

D. Other Concerns about Voting

i. Comparison of Groups

When participants in the focus groups were asked to express other concerns they may have about voting and the election process, voter education and voter access were two issues that were mentioned in most of the groups. Participants in all three population groups stressed the importance of voter education for their particular group of voters. Many of the participants believed that greater voter education would not only help to dispel confusion about aspects of the election process, but that it could also promote voting and encourage more people to turn out to vote.

In addition to voter education, some participants in the focus groups with voters with disabilities also expressed a desire for greater education of polling location staff. These participants believed that if polling location officials were informed about the needs of voters with disabilities, it can ease the difficulties this group of voters face with in-person voting.

Voter access was also an issue that was broached in most groups. Participants in the senior citizens and people with disabilities groups were especially concerned with access. Seniors believed that greater access should be provided to seniors in nursing homes, while voters with disabilities believed that a focus should be placed on increasing access for people with disabilities.

Participants in the groups compared of people with disabilities in Washington, DC, and low-income groups in Memphis, TN brought up the issue of lack of trust in the election system among their fellow community members and some participants expressed the belief that greater transparency in the election process can lead to greater trust in the system.

ii. Voters with Disabilities

For participants in the Washington, DC, voters with disabilities group, a key issue of concern about the voting process was easier access for in-person voting for voters with disabilities. There was some concern expressed in this group that a focus on absentee voting may lead to less effort by electoral authorities to make voting easier for people with disabilities. One participant worried that a focus on absentee voting would even lead to an erosion of rights for voters with disabilities.

Participants in the Washington, DC, group also stressed the importance of educating polling location staff on the needs of voters with disabilities and how they could respond to these needs. This was a direct result of earlier discussions of delays in curbside assistance and other physical challenges facing voters with disabilities at polling locations.

Participants in the Chico, CA, group stressed that voter education had to be increased so that all groups of voters were aware of their rights and responsibilities. Participants in this group also wanted election officials to stress the credibility of voting machines, as they believe that this can help increase turnout among voters with disabilities.

Participants in the Detroit, MI, group reported a greater lack of information about the election process in general, and therefore, stressed more voter education on voting options, assistance available at the polls, and on voting process and campaign issues generally. Some participants had concerns about the ballot itself, in terms of ensuring that the same number of candidate names would be available on the absentee ballot as on the regular ballot, increasing the size of the print and marking areas of the ballot and offering either white on black or black on white print depending on the type of vision impairment.

“I think there should be options...based upon somebody’s vision...Larger print, darker prints, and contrasts.” [Detroit, MI, F, 26-35]

“What about doing it online? They could send it in email and we could fill it out and send it right back.” [Detroit, MI, M, 46-55]

“There could be something audible...maybe they could have a pin number and do it over the phone...That way someone that is visually impaired or any other disability they can cast their vote.” [Detroit, MI, F, 26-35]

iii. Senior Citizens

For participants in the three groups comprising senior citizens, many of their other concerns about voting revolve around voting machines. Participants in the Oxford, MS, group felt that for some seniors, the voting machines can be intimidating and that assistance should be provided to these seniors to make voting easier, although their personal experiences with voting machines have generally been positive. Participants in

the Sacramento, CA, and Colorado Springs, CO, groups, on the other hand, were more concerned about the accuracy of voting machines and most participants in both these groups felt that there should be a paper trail for voting machines so that the results can be verified.

Other concerns that were mentioned included more information on election procedures for seniors and youth, as-well-as a desire that the election process be made uniform across the country so that voters who move do not have to understand a whole new system when they move to a new place.

“I'm not that trusting. I think handicapped people, people who can't get to the voting places, should be sent an absentee ballot. But... the fact that you just sign your name to the back of it and no identification is required. They can't prove who you are, just because you can fake a signature.” [Colorado Springs, CO, F, 66+]

“I've also experienced this chit-chatting [of the poll workers]. They are more interested in their conversation than in helping me get my ballot.”
[Sacramento, CA, F, 56-65]

iv. Low-Income Voters

For two groups of participants from low-income communities, lack of trust in the election system was a key concern, much more so than the other low-income group, or any of the other groups and populations. Most participants in Washington, DC, and Memphis, TN, thought that this lack of trust leads to apathy among voters in their communities because they are not sure whether their votes would count or because of concerns of being disenfranchised by election officials. Participants in the Washington, DC, group felt that free-postage absentee voting was one-step that could help to increase turnout in the election. Voters in both groups felt that if the process was more transient, it would lead to more trust in the election process.

Most of the participants in the Memphis, TN, group are strong believers in the use of technology like internet voting to make voting easier and to ease access to voting for people. Internet voting was also mentioned in the Adrian, MI, group, but most participants dismissed it due to concerns about security. This concern did not resonate with the voters in the Memphis, TN, group who felt that security issues have been addressed for other transactions on the internet such as: Banking and retail, and could also be addressed for voting.

Participants in the Adrian, MI, group voiced concerns about a lack of information about most aspects of the voting process. Participants in this focus group expressed a need for more voter education so that more voters can be encouraged to turn out for elections.

“I think educating people about absentee voting would be good—assume that 1 out of 3 might go to polls or vote absentee, but it depends on how valid they think it would become.” [Washington, DC, F, 66+]

“Sometimes even when it’s [the ballot] in English you can’t understand it.”
[Adrian, MI, F, 46-55]

Final cautionary note: Clearly, some differences appeared on the same subject matter of very similar groups in different parts of the nation. It is likely an indication that greater study of additional focus groups may clarify why voters in Memphis may not have the same responses to the similar groups in DC or other locations. Some surprisingly complicated concepts of fraud, manipulation of voters, and undue influence of voters, clearly indicate that focus group participants are not simply concluding that expansion of absentee balloting by mail is necessarily a one-dimensional issue. The study of the focus groups was valuable in establishing a window of opportunity to view not only whether expansion of mail balloting is useful to less advantaged voters, but how voters in target audiences think of the larger concerns about voting in a democracy. Clearly the perceptions focus group participants about fairness, about the integrity of the election process, and the concern about “does my vote count?” is as much a part of the answer for policy makers as the seemingly straightforward proposition of expansion of absentee mail ballots and free postage.

Appendix A: Demographic Overview of Focus Group Participants

Focus Groups among Individuals with Disabilities

Location: Washington, DC Metro Isa: 10 participants

Gender

- Male: 6
- Female: 3
- Transgender: 1

Race

- White: 2
- Black: 5
- No Answer: 3

Education

- High School or less: 4
- Some college: 1
- College graduate: 3
- Post graduate: 1
- No Answer: 1

Age Groups

- 18-24: 1
- 25-34: 1
- 35-44: 2
- 45-54: 3
- 55-64: 2
- No Answer: 1

Location: Detroit, MI: 8 participants

Gender

- Male: 5
- Female: 3

Race

- Black: 7
- No Answer: 1

Education

- High School or less: 5
- Some college: 2
- College graduate: 1

Age Groups

- 25-34: 1
- 35-44: 2
- 45-54: 3
- 65 and older: 2

Location: Chico, CA: 8 participants

Gender

- Male: 5
- Female: 3

Race

- White: 6
- No Answer/Refused: 2

Education

- High School or less: 1
- Some college: 4
- College graduate: 2
- No Answer/Refused: 1

Age Groups

- 25-34: 1
- 35-44: 2
- 45-54: 3
- 55-64: 1
- No Answer/Refused: 1

Focus Groups among Low-Income Individuals

Location: Adrian, MI: 9 participants

Gender

- Male: 4
- Female: 5

Race

- White: 6
- Black: 1
- Latino: 1
- Native American: 1

Education

- High School or less: 4
- Some college: 5

Age Groups

- 25-34: 2
- 35-44: 3
- 45-54: 3
- 55-64: 1

Location: Memphis, TN: 6 participants

Gender

- Male: 2
- Female: 4

Race

- Black: 3
- Other: 1
- Two or more races: 1
- No Answer: 1

Education

- High School or less: 1
- Some college: 3
- College graduate: 2

Age Groups

- 18-24: 1
- 25-34: 2
- 55-64: 3

Location: Washington, DC Metro Isa: 5 participants

Gender

- Male: 2
- Female: 3

Race

- Black: 5

Education

- High School or less: 1
- Some college: 2
- College graduate: 2

Age Groups

- 45-54: 2
- 55-64: 1
- 65 and older: 2

Focus Groups among Senior Citizens

Location: Sacramento, California: 5 participants

Gender

- Male: 2
- Female: 3

Race

- White: 2
- Black: 1
- Two or more races: 1
- No Answer: 1

Education

- College graduate: 1
- Post graduate: 4

Age Groups

- 55-64: 2
- 65 and older: 3

Location: Oxford, Lafayette County, MS: 8 participants

Gender

- Male: 2
- Female: 6

Race

- White: 8

Education

- High School or less: 1
- Some college: 4
- Post graduate: 3

Age Groups

- 65 and older: 8

Location: Colorado Springs, CO: 8 participants

Gender

- Male: 4
- Female: 4

Race

- White: 7
- No Answer: 1

Education

- High School or less: 1
- Some college: 2
- College graduate: 1
- Post graduate: 3
- No Answer: 1

Age Groups

- 65 and older: 7
- No Answer: 1

Overview of Demographics for Focus Group Participants

Demographics for Free Return Postage Focus Group Participants	
Gender	
Male	32
Female	34
Transgender	1
Race	
Black	22
White	31
Latino	1
Other	1
Two or more races	2
Native American	1
Refused/Did not answer question on comment sheet	9
Highest Level of Education	
High School or less	18
Some College	23
College Graduate	12
Post-Graduate	11
Refused/Did not answer question on comment sheet	3
Age Groups of Focus Group Participants	
18 to 25	2
25 to 34	7
35 to 44	9
45 to 54	14
55 to 64	10
65 and older	22
Refused/Did not answer question on comment sheet	3
Total sample n = 67	

Appendix B: Demographic Overview of Locations for Focus Groups

Locations for Focus Groups among Individuals with Disabilities

Location: Washington, DC

Population: 550,521

Registered Voters: 371,979

% Disabled: 21%

Median household income: \$46,211

% High school graduates: 78%

% College graduates: 39%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html>); District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics (http://www.dcboee.org/information/vrs_index.asp)

Location: Detroit, MI

Population: 911,402

Registered Voters: 1,362,651 (Wayne County)

% Disabled: 32.1%

Median household income: \$29,526

% High school graduates: 69.6%

% College graduates: 11%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2622000.html>); Michigan Department of State (http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1633_8722_14689-31523--,00.html)

Location: Chico, CA

Population: 67,509

Registered Voters: 115,659 (Butte County)

% Disabled: 15.2%

Median household income: \$29,359

% High school graduates: 87.3%

% College graduates: 33.6%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0613014.html>); California Secretary of State (<http://vote.ss.ca.gov>Returns/status.htm>)

Locations for Focus Groups among Low-Income Individuals

Location: Adrian, Lenawee County, Michigan

Population: 102,033 (Lenawee County)

Registered Voters: 69,325 (Lenawee County)

% below poverty line: 8% (Lenawee County)

Median household income: \$47,133 (Lenawee County)

% High school graduates: 83% (Lenawee County)

% College graduates: 16% (Lenawee County)

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/26091.html>; <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/26059.html>); Michigan Department of State (http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1633_8722_14688-147529--,00.html.)

Location: Memphis, TN
Population: 645,978
Registered Voters: 587,551 (Shelby County)
% below poverty line: 20.6%
Median household income: \$32,285
% High school graduates: 76.4%
% College graduates: 20.9%
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47/4748000.html>); Tennessee Department of State (<http://tennessee.gov/sos/election/data/turnout/2002-11.pdf>);

Location: Washington, DC
Population: 550,521
Registered Voters: 371,979
% below poverty line: 18.3%
Median household income: \$46,211
% High school graduates: 78%
% College graduates: 39%
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html>); District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics (http://www.dcboee.org/information/vrs_index.asp)

Locations for Focus Groups among Senior Citizens

Location: Sacramento, California
Population: 445,335
Registered Voters: 620,191 (Sacramento County)
% Aged 65+: 11%
Median household income: \$37,049
% High school graduates: 77%
% College graduates: 24%
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0664000.html>); County of Sacramento (<http://www.saccounty.net/elections/ENG/election-information/results-from-previous-elections/docs/2006-06-06-Primary-Election-results.pdf>)

Location: Oxford, Lafayette County, MS
Population: 2,910,540 (Lafayette County)
Registered Voters: 73.7% (Mississippi)
% Aged 65+: 12.3% (Lafayette County)
Median household income: \$34,278 (Lafayette County)
% High school graduates: 72.9% (Lafayette County)
% College graduates: 16.9% (Lafayette County)
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/28000.html>); <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/cps2004/tab04c.xls>

Location: Colorado Springs, CO
Population: 370,448
Registered Voters: 74.2% (Colorado)
% Aged 65+: 9.6%
Median household income: \$45,081
% High school graduates: 90.9%

% College graduates: 33.6%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/08/0816000.html>);
<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/cps2004/tab04c.xls>

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guides



Focus Group Free or Reduced Ballot Project Low-Income Discussion Guide

Introduction (5 minutes):

Moderator into: My name is

Project intro: This is a project funded by the Election Assistance Commission to identify the challenges that people like you face when participating in elections. Our discussion today would help us better understand the needs and challenges of people like you.

Ground rules for today's discussion:

- All points are valid and needed.
- It is okay to disagree—do not be disagreeable.
- Be specific and talk about your own experiences.
- Allow everyone to speak. Speak briefly and often, but please, no speeches.
- One person speaks at a time – please don't interrupt.
- Your contributions are anonymous and would not be connected to your name.
- There are observers in the room, but they won't be participating.
- This discussion would be videotaped, but this videotape would only be used for analysis as we write a report on these focus groups. You would not be individually identified in any of the reporting for this project.

Experiences voting—challenges and remedies (20 minute)

I'd like each of you to think back to the last Federal election that you voted in. By Federal election I mean voting for the President, the U.S. Senate, or the U.S. House of Representatives. What sticks out in your mind about the experience voting—not who you voted for but the process of voting itself?

- Probe: How do you vote: in-person at the polls or by mail?
- Probe: Is the process easy or hard?
- Probe: Did you encounter any particular difficulties?
- Probe: How did election officials respond?
- Probe: How did you resolve the situation?

And have any of you been in the situation where you wanted to vote but for some reason you just weren't able to?

- Probe: Can you talk a little bit about the circumstances that kept you from being able to vote?
- Probe: What sorts of things do you think could have been done to make it easier for you to be able to participate in elections?

Voting by mail and free or reduced postage (20 minutes)

As you may be aware, there has been a lot of discussion in the last year or so about the pluses and minuses of voting by mail. Some states have what is called “no-excuse absentee voting” that allows anyone who wants to, to be able to vote by mail-in absentee ballot. On the other hand, some states require people to provide a reason why they can't make it to the polls on Election Day.

What is your overall opinion of absentee voting by mail?

- Probe: Do you think everyone should have the opportunity to vote by mail or should this be limited to those with a valid excuse? For example, being sick, disabled or out of town on Election Day?

Who here has voted by mail?

- Probe: If you aren't able to vote by mail would you still have been able to vote at the polls?

Can you tell me about your experience the last time you mailed in an absentee ballot?

- Probe: Would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program have made things easier for you or would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program make no substantial impact in your ability to get your vote in?

Do you think that finding ways to make it easier for people to vote by mail-in absentee ballot would increase voter turn out among people like you?

- Probe: What sorts of things could be done to make this easier?
- Probe: What would be a good way of letting people like you know about such a program/change so that they could take advantage of these changes?
- What kind of impact do you think a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program would make on the ability of people like you to vote?

Would you have any concerns about voting by mail?

- Probe: Would you be concerned about the security of your ballot once you drop it in the mail box?
- Probe: Would you have concerns about the ballot reaching its destination in time?

Concerns about voting (15 minutes)

Still thinking about the elections process and voting, do any of you have personal concerns about voting that you would like to express?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?

- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

And do any of you have other more general concerns about election process or voting that you'd like to discuss?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?



Free or Reduced Ballot Project Discussion Guide for Senior Citizens

Introduction (5 minutes):

Moderator into: My name is

Project intro: This is a project funded by the Election Assistance Commission to identify the challenges that older voters face when participating in elections. Our discussion today would help us better understand the needs and challenges of people like you.

Ground rules for today's discussion:

- All points are valid and needed.
- It is okay to disagree—do not be disagreeable.
- Be specific and talk about your own experiences.
- Allow everyone to speak. Speak briefly and often, but please, no speeches.
- One person speaks at a time – please don't interrupt.
- Your contributions are anonymous and would not be connected to your name.
- There are observers in the room, but they won't be participating.
- This discussion would be videotaped, but this videotape would only be used for analysis as we write a report on these focus groups. You would not be individually identified in any of the reporting for this project.

Experiences voting—challenges and remedies (20 minute)

I'd like each of you to think back to the last Federal election that you voted in. By Federal election I mean voting for the President, the U.S. Senate, or the U.S. House of Representatives. What sticks out in your mind about the experience voting—not who you voted for but the process of voting itself?

- Probe: How did you vote: in-person at the polls or by mail?
- Probe: Is the process easy or hard?
- Probe: Did you encounter any particular difficulties?
- Probe: How did election official respond?
- Probe: How did you resolve the situation?

And have any of you been in the situation where you wanted to vote but for some reason you just weren't able to?

- Probe: Can you talk a little bit about the circumstances that kept you from being

able to vote?

- Probe: What sorts of things do you think could have been done to make it easier for you to be able to participate in elections?

Voting by mail and free or reduced postage (20 minutes)

As you may be aware, there has been a lot of discussion in the last year or so about the pluses and minuses of voting by mail. Some states have what is called “no-excuse absentee voting” that allows anyone who wants to, to be able to vote by mail-in absentee ballot. On the other hand, some states require people to provide a reason why they can’t make it to the polls on Election Day.

What is your overall opinion of absentee voting by mail?

- Probe: Do you think everyone should have the opportunity to vote by mail or should this be limited to those with a valid excuse? For example, being sick, disabled or out of town on Election Day?

Who here has voted by mail?

- Probe: If you aren’t able to vote by mail would you still have been able to vote at the polls?

Can you tell me about your experience the last time you mailed in an absentee ballot?

- Probe: Would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program have made things easier for you or would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program make no substantial impact in your ability to get your vote in?

Would finding ways to make it easier for people to vote by mail-in absentee ballot increase voter turn out among older voters?

- Probe: What sorts of things could be done to make this easier?
- Probe: What would be a good way of letting older voters know about such a program/changes so that they could take advantage of these changes?
- What kind of impact do you think a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program would make on the ability of older people to vote?

Would you have any concerns about voting by mail?

- Probe: Would you be concerned about the security of your ballot once you drop it in the mail box?
- Probe: Would you have concerns about the ballot reaching its destination in time?

Concerns about voting (15 minutes)

Still thinking about the elections process and voting, do any of you have personal concerns about voting that you would like to express?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

And do any of you have other more general concerns about voting and older citizens that you'd like to discuss?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- Probe: What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?



Focus Group
Free or Reduced Ballot Project
Discussion Guide for Voters with Disabilities

Introduction (5 minutes):

Moderator into: My name is

Project intro: This is a project funded by the Election Assistance Commission to identify the challenges that people with disabilities face when participating in elections. Our discussion today would help us better understand the needs and challenges of people like you.

Ground rules for today's discussion:

- All points are valid and needed.
- It is okay to disagree—do not be disagreeable.
- Be specific and talk about your own experiences.
- Allow everyone to speak. Speak briefly and often, but please, no speeches.
- One person speaks at a time – please don't interrupt.
- Your contributions are anonymous and would not be connected to your name.
- There are observers in the room, but they won't be participating.
- This discussion would be videotaped, but this videotape would only be used for analysis as we write a report on these focus groups. You would not be individually identified in any of the reporting for this project.

Experiences voting—challenges and remedies (20 minute)

I'd like each of you to think back to the last Federal election that you voted in. By Federal election I mean voting for the President, the U.S. Senate, or the U.S. House of Representatives. What sticks out in your mind about the experience of voting—not who you voted for but the process of voting itself?

- How did you vote: in-person at the polls or by mail?
- Probe: Is the process easy or hard?
- Did you encounter any particular difficulties?
- How did election officials respond?
- How did you resolve the situation?

And have any of you been in the situation where you wanted to vote but for some reason you just weren't able to?

- Probe: Can you talk a little bit about the circumstances that kept you from being

- able to vote?
- What sorts of things do you think that could have been done to make it easier for you to be able to participate in elections?

Voting by mail and free or reduced postage (20 minutes)

As you may be aware, there has been a lot of discussion in the last year or so about the pluses and minuses of voting by mail. Some states have what is called “no-excuse absentee voting” that allows anyone who wants to, to be able to vote by mail-in absentee ballot. On the other hand, some states require people to provide a reason why they can’t make it to the polls on Election Day.

What is your overall opinion of absentee voting by mail?

- Probe: Do you think everyone should have the opportunity to vote by mail or should this be limited to those with a valid excuse? For example, being sick, disabled or out of town on Election Day?

Who here has voted by mail?

- Probe: If you aren’t able to vote by mail would you still have been able to vote at the polls?

Can you tell me about your experience the last time you mailed in an absentee ballot?

- Probe: Would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program have made things easier for you or would a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program really make no impact in your ability to get your vote in.

Do you think that finding ways to make it easier for people to vote by mail-in absentee ballot increase voter turn out among voters with disabilities?

- Probe: What sorts of things could be done to make this easier?
- Probe: What would be a good way of letting voters with disabilities know about such a program/changes so that they could take advantage of these changes?
- What kind of impact do you think a free or discounted absentee ballot postage program would make on the ability of people with disabilities to vote?

Would you have any concerns about voting by mail?

- Probe: Would you be concerned about the security of your ballot once you drop it in the mail box?
- Probe: Would you have concerns about the ballot reaching its destination in time?

Concerns about voting (15 minutes)

Still thinking about the elections process and voting, do any of you have personal concerns about voting that you would like to express?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

And do any of you have other more general concerns about voting and voters with disabilities that you would like to discuss?

- Probe: How do you think this problem could be solved?
- What would a program like this look like; how could it be implemented?

*This information collection is required for the EAC to meet its statutory requirements under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 (42 U.S.C. 15301). Respondent's obligation to reply to this information collection is voluntary; respondents include the 50 States, and the District of Columbia. This information would be made publicly available on the EAC website at www.eac.gov. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is OMB Control No. 3265-0008 (expires: 07/31/2010). The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 1.25 hours per response. Comments regarding this burden estimate should be sent to the Program Manager – 2007 Study of the Feasibility and Advisability of Establishing a Program of Free Return Postage for Absentee Ballots, U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 1225 New York Ave, NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005.