



SIERRA CLUB MONTANA CHAPTER

Protect Voting Rights in Montana: Oppose HB 406 & HB 176, Support HB 613

HB 406 is an attempt at voter suppression that will disproportionately impact Native American communities, HB 176 closes voter registration on noon the day before the election, and HB 613 would help expand voting opportunities on reservations.

OPPOSE [HB 406](#): **Revise Absentee and Mail Ballot Laws (Representative Mark Noland)**

- This bill would revise the Montana Interference Ballot Protection Act (BIPA) and would place a handful of restrictions on those who collect ballots or turn in a ballot for another individual.
- A number of voter advocacy organizations provide services that make it easier for people to vote, including picking up ballots and turning them in. This bill would make this process very difficult by requiring those who pick up ballots to go through a lengthy process when they turn the ballots in, including:
 - Providing the name and address of the voter,
 - Providing their relationship to the voter,
 - and providing a signed form from the voter to be verified by the election administrator.
- Living in a very rural area, living with disabilities, or lack of access to reliable transportation can all pose hurdles for turning in absentee ballots. This bill is an attempt to exclude the voices of folks who have to overcome more obstacles in order to vote. [Tribal leaders have called out the ways this bill specifically discriminates against folks on reservations.](#)
- HB 406 is similar to a bill introduced in 2018 that amended BIPA by limiting who was allowed to pick up a ballot and also limited everyone from picking up more than six ballots. This law was challenged in court and district judges ruled it unconstitutional because it placed burdens on the right to vote. HB 406 removes the six bill limit imposed by the 2018 amendment and instead makes it practically impossible to pick up a ballot for someone else.

OPPOSE [HB 176](#): **Revise Voter Registration Laws (Representative Sharon Greef)**

- HB 176 would get rid of Montana's tradition of same-day voter registration and close voter registration at noon on the day before the election.
- This is another voter suppression bill that makes it harder to vote and could especially impact tribes, elderly folks, people with disabilities, and students.
- In the 2018 general election, there was at least one same-day voter registrant in 54 out of 56 counties, a point noted by a lobbyist for MontPIRG in testimony against HB 176 ([Montana Free Press](#)). [In Ravalli county](#), there were hundreds of registrants in the last two days before the 2020 general election that would not have been counted if this bill had been on the books.

SUPPORT [HB 613](#): **Generally Revise Laws Related to Tribal Voting (Representative Sharon-Stewart Paragoy)**

- While other measures seek to restrict voting rights, this bill would expand voting rights for Native American voters living on reservations.

- Some of the obstacles faced by folks on reservations include long drives to polling locations, no physical mailing address, and a lack of reliable transportation.
- [This bill would expand voting opportunities for indigenous voters](#) because:
 - It requires precinct polling places to include locations on reservations,
 - It requires tribes to select two permanent satellite election offices within the reservation or to a place most convenient to the members of the tribe
 - It will allow tribal members to vote using a nontraditional address like a tribal government building when registering to vote
 - It allows the usage of expired IDs or IDs with no expiration date for tribal members to vote
 - It improves voter education and increases the number of ballot drop boxes on reservations.

Voting Rights & Protecting the Environment

We can't pass and maintain strong environmental protections without a strong democracy. Voter suppression increases the power of corporations and large donors in our politics and typically disenfranchises BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities, young people, and people with disabilities. On the flip side, expanding access to voting increases the likelihood that we will select elected officials who will represent and be accountable to the needs of our communities and our state. You can read more about Sierra Club's perspective on voting rights [here](#).

Check out our [citizen lobbying resources](#) and contact your legislators about these bills. For more updates on bills related to voting rights, follow Western Native Voice, Forward Montana, Montana Women Vote, and ACLU of Montana.