



The Honorable Carolyn Maloney
2332 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3214

**Subject: Support for H.R. 1739
“Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2009”**

Dear Representative Maloney,

July 27, 2009

Thank you so much for your consistent, strong support of overseas and military voters’ issues during your years of service. H.R. 1739, the “Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2009” is clearly representative of your steadfast commitment to overseas and military voter’s rights. The purpose of this letter is to state our position of support for H.R. 1739.

We commend you on the crafting of a bill that truly is what it says it is: practical. These are reforms that are begging to be implemented. H.R. 1739 is an initiative to take a stagnant voting program and refresh it with sensible, well-researched amendments that address the persistent problems of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). We believe it will greatly benefit the program.

Overseas Vote Foundation (OVF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that focuses on the facilitation and increased participation of overseas and military voters. We do this through the development of online UOCAVA voter services for voters and states. Your proposed legislation is of primary interest to our organization, our work and our mission.

H.R. 1739 addresses many of the problems and concerns that OVF has identified through research, as well as from the feedback that we receive via the OVF Voter Help Desk.

Several specific, notable examples include:

Problem: 31% of OVF Post-Election 2008 Survey respondents (approximately 5,300 individuals) who received a ballot and tried to vote had problems with their return envelopes, such as “postage required” being printed on the envelope, “USA” not included in the address, and witness or notary requirements.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: This problem is addressed in two different sections of H.R. 1739. Section 3 prohibits the refusal to accept application, ballots and other materials for failure to meet non essential requirements. Section 5 requires the clarification of postage markings on certain balloting materials mailed by states.

Problem: 58% of voters participating in the OVF survey did not receive confirmation that their registration had been received and processed. This occurred despite the fact that 80% of local election officials reported rejecting some applications. Voters who do not know that their application has been rejected and wait for a ballot that never comes, may not use a Federal Write-in Absentee ballot (FWAB), which would also be rejected because unbeknownst to them, they are not. These voters are denied the ability to follow-up, receive a ballot and vote.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Section 9 of H.R. 1739 will require local election officials to send out prompt notification of registration and ballot request rejections.

Problem: Approximately 30% of survey respondents did not register or could not complete the process because they missed the appropriate deadline. The number one reason for registration form rejection as reported by local election officials was "missed deadline."

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Section 7 of H.R. 1739 expands the use of the FWAB to include simultaneous registration and voting which would reduce instances of missed deadlines and offer overseas and military voters one of the same conveniences that US based voters enjoy. This is very practical in that the cover form of the FWAB is nearly identical to that of the voter registration form, the FPCA.

In states that offer same-day voter registration, this provision allows voters and states to utilize one form as a combined one-step voter registration + ballot-request + ballot. It also specifies that Federal write-in ballots can be used for both Federal and State elections. Election officials and voters benefit through reduction of a multi-step process of registration/ballot request, ballot sending and return. Such a system for last minute balloting reduces administrative costs of UOCAVA program and improves chances that voters will successfully cast their ballots.

Problem: It is difficult to assess the level of confusion created for voters by the insistence upon jargon inherent in the UOCAVA program; however, the most fundamental of these is the continuing reference to the federal voter registration/ballot request form as a "Post Card". The importance of intuitive nomenclature cannot be underestimated. We have experience voters insisting that anything called a "post card" is not the right form.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Section 2 of H.R. 1739 logically proposes to modernize the name of the most commonly used form, now referred to as a "Federal Post Card Application" to be a "Federal Voter Registration and Absentee Ballot Request Form" or another name that accurately reflects its function and purpose.

OVF encourages your staff to seriously consider changes suggested by Secretaries of State who are responsible for implementing UOCAVA, which, we believe will further strengthen the legislation. We are impressed by the diligent approach you have taken to many of the long-term persistent problems that have hampered the improvement and increased enfranchisement of overseas and military voters.

Thank you for this valuable initiative. OVF looks forward to working with you as needed to assure the successful passing of H.R. 1739.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S. Dzieduszycka-Suinat". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and stylized.

Susan Dzieduszycka-Suinat
President and CEO, Overseas Vote Foundation