



## Agency Recommendation Summary

The Office of the Secretary of State (OSOS) is seeking \$352,000 to enhance VoteWA to provide voters across innovative tools to be alerted of their ballot status and secure, accessible, and usable ways to respond to any required notices. These techniques were informed by the findings within the 2022 SAO Performance Audit regarding ballot rejection rates. This funding will integrate technologies for voters to electronically cure challenged ballots and use alternative signature verification methods, improving accessibility, security, and convenience, particularly for voters with disabilities, military personnel, overseas voters, and other underserved groups.

## Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2026	2027	2025-27	2028	2029	2027-29
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001 - 1	\$176	\$176	\$352	\$176	\$176	\$352
Total Expenditures	\$176	\$176	\$352	\$176	\$176	\$352

## Decision Package Description

### Background

The [2022 SAO Performance Audit evaluating Washington’s Ballot Rejection Rates](#) highlighted significant disparities in rejection rates across counties and demographic groups during the 2020 general election. The audit stressed the importance of better methods to notify voters of ballot issues and provide ways to correct them, reducing rejection rates and promoting equitable access to voting. King County Elections piloted a system combining ballot status text notifications with secure electronic cure technology and found that voters who received text notifications were twice as likely to correct their ballots and vote.

### Problem Statement

The current voter portal lacks secure and efficient methods for voters to correct (cure) issues with their ballots. The 2022 SAO Audit report underscored this gap, showing that younger voters and those from racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to have their ballots rejected. It is crucial to address these deficiencies to ensure that all voters, regardless of physical ability, location, or demographic background, can fully participate in elections.

### Solution Statement

OSOS proposes to enhance the voter portal by integrating two effective technologies: OmniBallot and TXT2Cure. OmniBallot will offer a secure, accessible way for voters to mark their ballots electronically or print a blank ballot to mark by hand, improving both the accessibility and security of the online replacement ballot system. This integration consolidates the marked or blank ballot with a return packet, reducing the risk of incomplete submissions, which would prevent the ballot from being counted.

TXT2Cure will provide voters with immediate text notifications if their ballot is challenged, directing them to an online platform to quickly and securely submit a signature cure form. These technologies address the issues identified in the 2022 SAO Audit by enhancing accessibility, reducing ballot rejection rates, and ensuring all voters can fully participate in the electoral process.

To implement these improvements, OSOS seeks funding to cover software licenses and support services for both systems, including ongoing integration costs, training for election staff, and technical support. These enhancements will be available to all counties in Washington State, ensuring a more accessible, secure, and user-friendly voting process for all voters.

### Alternatives Explored

After careful consideration, no viable alternatives were identified that could meet the critical needs addressed by this proposal. The current voter portal lacks the necessary accessibility and functionality to serve voters with disabilities, military personnel, and those who vote remotely.

Maintaining the status quo would continue to disenfranchise these groups, potentially leading to lower voter participation and decreased public trust in the electoral process.

While alternatives such as lower-cost options, collaboration with other agencies, or regulatory changes were considered, none could adequately address the specific technical requirements or provide the same level of accessibility, security, and user-friendliness that this proposal offers. Given the importance of ensuring that all eligible voters can participate fully in elections, this solution was deemed the most effective and necessary.

#### **Existing resources**

The agency lacks existing resources and has no related maintenance level decision packages to support the proposed voter portal enhancements. Without new funding, the necessary upgrades, including OmniBallot and TXT2Cure integration, cannot be achieved. No past budget items have addressed these needs, making this funding request essential to move forward.

## Assumptions and Calculations

### ***Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:***

Not Applicable

### ***Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:***

See Attachment

### ***Workforce Assumptions:***

Not Applicable

### ***Historical Funding:***

Not Applicable

## Strategic and Performance Outcomes

### ***Strategic Framework:***

This proposal directly supports the Office of the Secretary of State's (OSOS) Objective 1: to improve access to OSOS resources and enhance public engagement by expanding the voter portal's capabilities, ensuring equitable access to voting for all citizens, including those in historically underserved communities.

It aligns with the Governor's Results Washington Goal 5: Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government by leveraging technology to improve public service delivery and accessibility. Additionally, it supports WaTech's Goal 1: Create a government experience that leaves no community behind by utilizing innovative technology solutions to enhance service delivery and ensure equitable outcomes across all communities.

### ***Performance Outcomes:***

Success will be measured by:

- The number of voters using OmniBallot, focusing on those with disabilities and remote voters.
- Voter satisfaction ratings, particularly among these key groups.
- Maintaining the security and integrity of the voting process with no significant breaches.
- Ease of use for voters and election staff, indicated by positive feedback and fewer support requests.

## Equity Impacts

### **Community Outreach and Engagement:**

Not Applicable

### **Disproportional Impact Considerations:**

Not Applicable

### **Target Communities and Populations:**

This proposal aims to improve voting access for groups that have historically faced barriers, such as voters with disabilities, military personnel, overseas voters, and other underserved groups. These groups often struggle with signing and returning ballots, limiting their ability to fully participate in elections. By enhancing the voter portal with OmniBallot and TXT2Cure, this proposal seeks to reduce these barriers and create a more equitable voting experience for all Washingtonians.

### **Community Inputs and Incorporation:**

Not Applicable

## Other Collateral Connections

### **HEAL Act Agencies Supplemental Questions**

Not Applicable

### **Puget Sound Recovery:**

Not Applicable

### **State Workforce Impacts:**

Not Applicable

### **Intergovernmental:**

The expansion of the voter portal using Democracy Live's OmniBallot system is expected to positively impact various levels of government. Specifically, at the county level, the enhanced system will help reduce the administrative burden associated with managing absentee and remote voting.

### **Stakeholder Impacts:**

Voters with disabilities are key non-governmental stakeholders who will benefit significantly from the enhanced accessibility features provided by the OmniBallot system, allowing them to participate in elections more easily and independently. Military personnel and overseas voters are also important stakeholders, as they will gain a more convenient and secure way to receive, mark, and return their ballots. Additionally, younger voters and those from racial and ethnic minorities, who are often underserved, will benefit from improved accessibility and functionality of the voter information portal, making it easier to access and cure their ballot. These improvements are expected to reduce barriers to participation in the electoral process. Voters with disabilities are key non-governmental stakeholders who will benefit significantly from the enhanced accessibility features provided by the OmniBallot system, allowing them to participate in elections more easily and independently. Military personnel and overseas voters are also important stakeholders, as they will gain a more convenient and secure way to receive, mark, and return their ballots. Additionally, younger voters and those from racial and ethnic minorities, who are often underserved, will benefit from improved accessibility and functionality of the voter information portal, making it easier to access and cure their ballot. These improvements are expected to reduce barriers to participation in the electoral process.

### **State Facilities Impacts:**

Not Applicable

**Changes from Current Law:**

Not Applicable

**Legal or Administrative Mandates:**

This proposal is not a direct response to litigation or an executive order. However, it is in direct response to findings from the 2022 State Auditor's Performance Audit, which evaluated ballot rejection rates across Washington State. The audit highlighted significant disparities in rejection rates during the 2020 general election, particularly among younger voters, racial and ethnic minorities, and voters with disabilities. The audit stressed the need for better notification systems and improved processes to help voters cure issues with their ballots.

Additionally, this proposal aligns with ongoing efforts to comply with federal mandates related to accessible voting, specifically the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). These laws mandate that voting processes be accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. By integrating proven technologies to enhance accessibility and reduce ballot rejection rates, this proposal supports compliance with these federal requirements and ensures equitable participation in elections.

**Governor's Salmon Strategy:**

Not Applicable

**Reference Documents**

- [BR-ML-Lower Ballot Rejections with Tech-CostModel\\_FINAL.xlsm](#)
- [BR-ML-Lower Ballot Rejections with Tech-ITA WaTech Submission.pdf](#)
- [BR-ML-Lower Ballot Rejections with Tech-ITABudget\\_FINAL.xlsx](#)
- [PA\\_Evaluating\\_WA\\_Ballot\\_Rejections\\_ar-1029711.pdf](#)

**IT Addendum**

**Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?**

Yes

**Objects of Expenditure**

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2026	2027	2025-27	2028	2029	2027-29
Obj. C	\$153	\$153	\$306	\$153	\$153	\$306
Obj. T	\$23	\$23	\$46	\$23	\$23	\$46

**Agency Contact Information**

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