

Less than two-thirds of absentee ballots returned as voters head to the polls for spring election

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Less than two-thirds of the absentee ballots requested for today's election have been registered as returned, which may be partly due to indefinitely confined voters failing to send them back after automatically receiving them.

The latest update from the Elections Commission, posted this morning, shows clerks have registered 278,896 absentee ballots returned out of the 429,991 they had sent.

Meanwhile, just half of the absentee ballots requested for the February primary were returned.

By comparison, more than 1.9 million of the almost 2.1 million absentee ballots requested for November — more than 93 percent — had been reported as returned the morning of the election. Ultimately, nearly 96 percent of the absentee ballots that had been requested were returned.

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The campaigns of state superintendent Deb Kerr and Jill Underly said they were reaching out to supporters via phone and text to encourage the return of absentee ballots. Ballots must be in by 8 p.m. today in order to be counted.

Ethan Hollenberger with Kerr's campaign said he suspects the high number of absentee ballots still out is due to a number of factors, including some who plan to vote in person today as well as those who were undecided about races until the last minute.

Along with the state superintendent's race on today's ballot, there are also two special elections for open legislative seats, two appeals court races and numerous local races.

"And I think there are people who aren't engaged (in the spring race), and I think a bunch are in the mail," Hollenberger said.

The number of voters who claimed indefinitely confined status surged by November to 265,979, up from 70,218 in November 2018.

Under state law, those voters automatically receive an absentee ballot for every election unless they send notice they are no longer indefinitely confined or fail to return one.

Local clerks make note of those who fail to return an absentee ballot and follow up with voters to see if they wish to remain on the indefinitely confined list. Those who don't respond to the inquiry within 30 days are removed.

Absentee ballots for the April election had to be mailed by March 16, which was less than 30 days after the February primary.