

DRAFT STUDY PLAN – SJ 35: STUDY OF VOTER LIST MAINTENANCE AND INTEGRITY

STATE ADMINISTRATION AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS INTERIM COMMITTEE
PREPARED BY REBECCA C. POWER – JANUARY 2026

INTRODUCTION

At the June 2025 Legislative Council meeting, the council assigned SJ 35: Study of Voter List Maintenance and Integrity to the State Administration and Veterans' Affairs (SAVA) Interim Committee. During the September 2025 SAVA meeting, committee members voted to allocate 0.35 FTE to SJ 35 in the committee work plan. This includes multiple staff papers and presentations, several panels of stakeholders, state officials, and national officials, a final report, and committee legislation to introduce during the 2027 legislative session. This study plan is a road map for the committee to assist in planning and time management related to the study for the remainder of the interim. This document will be updated after each committee work session.

TASKS LISTED IN SJ 35 STUDY RESOLUTION

The following tasks are included in the SJ 35 study resolution:

- Study voter list maintenance in Montana, including the practices associated with maintaining these lists at the local level by county election administrators and at the state level by the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Research practices used in other states and identify best practices.
- Identify and correct inconsistencies and inadequacies in Montana election voter list maintenance programs that compromise election integrity.
- Evaluate how state and local databases, such as those maintained by the Motor Vehicle Division, utility companies, courts, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Public Health and Human Services, may be used to help maintain the accuracy of voter lists.
- Evaluate how national databases, such as those maintained by the United States Postal Service, could be better utilized to help maintain the accuracy of voter lists.
- Research what other federal data is available regarding citizenship and voting history that may be useful for maintaining the accuracy of voter lists.
- Identify places in which state law needs to be reconciled with federal law.
- Develop legislation to address these issues and be introduced in the 70th legislative session.
- Consult with all interested stakeholders, including but not limited to election administrators, the Office of the Secretary of State, and concerned citizens.

TOPICS OF INTEREST IDENTIFIED BY COMMITTEE

As of the November 2025 meeting, committee members identified the following broad areas of interest related to the SJ 35 study:

- Review current practices and laws in Montana governing voter list maintenance
- Identify parts of Montana law that need to be updated and/or expanded to match federal requirements and standard practices
- Review national best practices from the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and practices in other states and consider if there are any Montana should consider adopting

INTERIM STUDY PROCESS & PROPOSED TIMELINE

The following is a proposed timeline for the SJ 35 study, including the typical phases of an interim study and the topics/presentations requested by the committee.

MEETING	AGENDA ITEMS	COMMITTEE ACTION ITEMS
PHASE ONE: GATHER INFORMATION <i>The first phase of the study is carried out over the first few meetings of the interim, when the committee:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviews staff research papers and other informational materials on study topics; hears presentations by experts on various aspects of the study topics; and takes public comment from interested parties, who may offer specific study-related suggestions. 		
July 30, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of study resolution and discussion of draft work plan Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approve draft SAVA work plan and SJ 35 FTE allocation
September 25, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel discussion of election administrators re. current voter list maintenance practices in Montana Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize SAVA work plan and SJ 35 FTE allocation
November 17, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff presentation re. voter list maintenance practices in other states & EAC best practices DPHHS presentation re. current process for updating death records and providing info to SOS/counties Committee work session Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify topics for January agenda
January 12, 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update from SOS Office re. SAVE Program & Presidential Executive Order Presentation & discussion re. UOCAVA voters Presentation re. voters of unsound mind Presentation re. research requests related to information sharing Committee work session Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify topics for March agenda Begin to discuss narrowing focus of study and identifying specific issues to address in final report and committee legislation
PHASE TWO: IDENTIFY ISSUES & NARROW FOCUS <i>In the second phase, the Committee spends a meeting or two narrowing the focus of the study. Members identify topics or questions they'd like to analyze further. This phase helps members concentrate on the issues they consider to be of the greatest importance and obtain any additional information needed to make final recommendations.</i>		
March 9, 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations TBD Committee work session Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize specific issues to address in final report and committee legislation and begin to discuss possible approaches for each / begin discussing committee legislation

PHASE THREE: ANALYZE INFORMATION & IDENTIFY OPTIONS FOR ACTION

During the third stage, members review and decide on options for action. Potential solutions, including legislation, are usually reviewed and refined at multiple meetings before the Committee takes final action.

May 4, 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations TBD • Committee work session • Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue discussion of possible approaches for identified issues and give bill drafting directions to staff for committee legislation
July 7, 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee work session • Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review draft SJ 35 final report • Review draft SJ 35 committee legislation

PHASE FOUR: FINALIZE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, & DELIVERABLES

By the end of the interim, the committee should finalize a set of findings and recommendations and complete any deliverables including a final report and, possibly, committee legislation for the next legislative session.

September 2, 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee work session • Public comment / stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize SJ 35 final report • Finalize SJ 35 committee legislation
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