

## **MOBILE VOTER PROGRAM**

The Indian River County Supervisor of Elections introduced the 2024 Mobile Voter Program (MVP) in response to changes made by the Florida Legislature regarding vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots. The new legislation requires voters to request VBM ballots prior to each General Election cycle. Requests for VBM ballots have historically been valid through two General Election cycles, up to four years. With the passage of SB90, a voter must submit a mail ballot request for each General Election cycle.

During the 2022 General Election cycle, Indian River County had 42,000 mail ballot requests on file. On Jan. 1, 2023, all vote-by-mail requests expired as a result of the new legislation. This change in law, combined with the Supervisor of Elections' ongoing quest for inclusive democracy, challenged the staff to develop a program to inform voters about the expiration of their mail ballot request.

As 2023 progressed, Indian River County was struggling to motivate voters to renew their mail ballot request. With the upcoming 2024 Presidential Election cycle, it was imperative that voters who typically vote-by-mail were made aware of the law change. In 2024, the Supervisor of Elections (SOE) team implemented a creative program to reach out to a special group of voters whose mail ballot request had expired. The SOE formed a partnership with the Senior Resource Association (SRA) to deliver election information to those who may be homebound or have limited mobility.

The Senior Resource Association is recognized as the lead agency in Indian River County for promoting home and community-based services to older adults and transportation for all. Services offered by the Senior Resource Association include congregate meal sites, Meals on Wheels, Community Coach buses, and the GoLine Public Transportation system. By partnering with this remarkable organization, the Supervisor of Elections team could personally engage those served by the Senior Resource Association.

During our initial meeting with the Director of the Senior Resource Association, we discussed the different services offered by the SRA and the number of program participants. We estimated that we could reach approximately 1,800 individuals served by SRA.

To kick off the presidential election cycle and to celebrate SRA's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the Mobile Voter Program rolled out in January 2024. This unique program centered around connecting with traditionally harder-to-reach Indian River County residents by going mobile and providing them with our Mobile Voter Packet.

Reaching eligible voters is crucial, but often, many individuals face barriers to accessing voting information due to lack of mobility or transportation. By engaging these individuals, it ensures their voices are heard, upholding the democratic principle of inclusivity and representation for all citizens.

The Elections Office staff assembled 1,800 Mobile Voter Packets. The packets contained a vote-by-mail request form, a voter registration application and return envelope for new voters and those needing to update their voting information, Voter Guide, Government Officials Guide, Frequently Asked Questions brochure, pen, American flag and a sweet treat.

Beginning the first week of January, SOE staff were on site for the Senior Resource Association's Congregate Meal Program, which provides meals five days per week for approximately 300 people. Meals are provided at five separate locations throughout the county. All in attendance at the meal sites were provided a Mobile Voter Packet and the opportunity to have their voting questions answered.

During the second week of January, SOE staff participated in the Meals on Wheels program. This program provides meals to individuals who may not have the resources to access or prepare food due to lack of transportation, functional limitations or health problems. Elections staff rode along with the Meals on Wheels volunteers delivering hot lunches to seniors at their homes and providing them with vote-by-mail applications and miscellaneous election information contained in the Mobile Voter Packet. Throughout the week, more than 500 informational packets were delivered to homebound individuals.

As part of the ongoing mobile program, Supervisor of Elections staff traveled on the Senior Resource Association's GoLine, a no-cost public transit system. The GoLine is ADA-accessible and free to all riders along 15 fixed routes throughout the county. The team at the Elections Office rode on several bus routes throughout the week, providing riders with SOE contact cards and offering riders the opportunity to renew their vote-by-mail ballot request and even register to vote. Informational signs were displayed inside GoLine buses for riders to view while traveling on the bus. The signs displayed a QR code directing bus riders to renew their vote-by-mail ballot request, register to vote, or update their voter record via the Supervisor of Elections website.

The Senior Resource Association also operates the Community Coach, a door-to-door transit system for eligible riders with no other means of transportation. Community Coach vans accommodate riders who use wheelchairs, walkers, canes, service animals and other mobility aids. During the month of January, Community Coach Drivers distributed more than 1,000 riders with Mobile Voter Packets. The joy on the faces of those individuals receiving a Mobile Voter Packet warmed the hearts of our Elections Office team, as many of these individuals have limited contact with others.

Collaborating with the Senior Resource Association allowed the SOE to reach underserved and often overlooked voters who ride public transit, take advantage of congregate meal programs, receive Meals on Wheels, and utilize the Community Coach for transportation to doctor appointments and shopping. The Mobile Voter Program provided the Supervisor of Elections office with the opportunity to amplify democracy through innovation and bridge gaps to empower every voice.

The cost of the 1,800 Mobile Voter Packets was \$1,582, a per person cost of .88¢. Yes, we could have mailed these individuals information about renewing their vote-by-mail request, but the Mobile Voter Packets provided one-on-one interaction and allowed the recipients to feel socially connected. By going mobile, voting awareness was personally delivered to our harder-to-reach residents of Indian River County.