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VOTE ABSENTEE

Who may vote absentee?

Registered voters may vote absentee only if they will be unable to vote at the polls on election day because of:

- absence from their city or town during the hours the polls are open
- physical disability
- religious beliefs

Illegal absentee voting is punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and up to a year in prison.

Certain unregistered voters also have a right to vote absentee. These are United States citizens living outside of the country and federal service personnel, including those on active duty in the armed forces and in the merchant marine, and their accompanying spouses or dependents. In all cases these people must register in person when they return since this does not establish permanent registration.

How do I vote absentee?

There are two ways to vote absentee

- by mail — an absentee ballot may be sent to any address you specify including your own home
- in person — at your city or town hall

You must apply in advance for either type of ballot. To be counted, a completed ballot must be received by the time the polls close on election day.

How do I get an absentee ballot?

You must apply for an absentee ballot to your city or town clerk **no later than noon of the day before the election.** Applications do not have to be mailed; they may be hand delivered. However, apply early since **ballots must be sent by mail both ways.** You may use the official application form or any form of written communication (letter or post card). Each applicant must sign his own name on the request.

Include on the application:

- your name as registered
- your registration address
- ward and precinct if you know them
- the precise address to which you wish the ballot sent
- in a primary election the party ballot you wish to receive
- your own signature

If you are in the federal service or an accompanying spouse or dependent, or are a United States citizen living out of the country, you may have a relative apply in person for your ballot.

May I vote at my city or town hall before election day?

Instead of having your ballot mailed to you, you may vote prior to the election at a time arranged with the clerk. Contact your clerk for details. Application for this ballot must be made no later than noon of the day before the election.

What if I am physically disabled?

If you are **temporarily physically disabled**, you may apply for an absentee ballot attesting under penalties of perjury that you are disabled. An absentee ballot will be sent to you.

If you are **permanently physically disabled**, and cannot cast your vote at the polling place, you may file a letter from your physician with your city or town clerk. Your physician must state that you are permanently unable to cast your vote at the polling place because of physical disability. The city or town clerk will put your name on the list of permanently disabled voters. You will still need to request a ballot in writing before each election, but will not have to certify your disability each time.

Do I need to have my absentee ballot notarized?

If you are on your city or town list of **permanently disabled voters**, you do not need to vote in the presence of a notary; you merely sign the envelope yourself. **Temporarily disabled voters** must have their ballot envelopes notarized.

Students' ballot envelopes may either be notarized or signed by the registrar or assistant registrar of the college or university they are attending.

All other voters must have their ballots notarized. You vote privately in the presence of a notary who may not see how you vote or discuss your choices.

Massachusetts notaries may not charge for this service. Ballots must be filled out, notarized, and **mailed** to your city or town clerk or election commission.

How do I use the absentee ballot?

Read all the instructions carefully before you mark the ballot.

Absentee ballots must be mailed both ways. Ballots cannot be hand carried to the voter or from the voter to local election officials.

Return your absentee ballot promptly. In order to be counted, absentee ballots must be received by the time the polls close on election day.

Return postage must be paid by the voter. The only exception is for federal service personnel, for whom postage is free if mailed from a U.S. Post Office.

REGISTER

Who may register to vote?

Any citizen of the United States who is a Massachusetts resident and who will be 18 years old by election day may register to vote.

You must register if you want to vote.

How often must I register?

Registration is permanent in Massachusetts. You need register again only if you move to another city or town, change your name, or fail to reply to a notice from the registrars of voters that your name is being removed from the voting list. If you move within your community, notify your registrars of voters in writing.

When and where may I register?

There is no waiting period to be eligible to register. If you have recently moved, you may register to vote as soon as you move into your new home.

Most registrars of voters will register you in city or town halls during regular business hours. Some large cities maintain additional registration places. Communities have special registration sessions before elections. Call the registrars at your city or town hall for specific times and places in your community.

Are there registration deadlines?

Yes. Registration is closed for a brief time before each election to allow election officials time to prepare the voting lists for that election. Closings occur:

- 28 days before presidential primaries, regular state primaries and state elections
- 20 days before city or town elections, town meetings, special primaries and special elections
- 10 days before special town meetings

If you register during a "closed" period you will be eligible to vote only in later elections.

How do I register?

Go to one of your local registration places. It might be helpful to bring some identification or proof of residence with you. You will be asked to complete an affidavit of registration which must be answered truthfully under penalty of perjury. The questions on the affidavit which you must answer are:

- name (women may register using their maiden name)
- present residence
- residence as of January 1, if different
- last previous residence in another city or town, if any
- name used at that residence, if different
- date of birth
- U.S. citizen (by birth or naturalization)
- occupation
- preferred party enrollment, if any

How do I register if I am physically disabled?

Write to your local registrars of voters so that your application is received no less than three days before the close of registration for the election. Two registration officers will come to your residence, rest home, or hospital and register you if you cannot go out to register.

VOTE

Where and when may I vote?

Polling places are usually located in your neighborhood. Poll hours vary. During state and city elections the polls must be open for at least 10 hours. They must open no later than 10 a.m. and for state elections remain open until 8 p.m. During town elections the polls must open by noon and remain open for at least four hours. You can learn the exact hours and polling places in your community from your city or town hall or local newspaper.

If you are in line when the polls close, you may vote.

How do I vote?

Sample ballots and instruction cards are posted at the polling place. Election officers are required by law to help if you do not understand the voting procedures.

When you enter the polling place, give your name, address, and if it is a primary election, your party preference. You vote alone in the voting booth unless you ask for help. If you are physically disabled or cannot read English, you may ask any qualified voter or election officers for assistance. After you enter the voting booth you have five minutes to complete your voting if others are waiting. If you vote on paper ballots or punch cards and make a mistake, you are entitled to another ballot, but only up to a total of three ballots.

What if my name is not on the list?

If you have registered but your name is omitted from the voting list or is listed incorrectly, you may ask the election officer in charge of the polling place to call city or town hall to check your registration. If you are found to be correctly registered, you may vote.

If the election officer is unable to confirm your registration, you should go to the city or town hall. If your registration is correct you may vote immediately on an absentee ballot. You may, if you prefer, obtain a certificate from the registrar and return to your usual polling place to vote.

How can I vote in a primary?

If you state a political party preference when you register, you will be given the ballot of that party when you vote in a primary. If you are not enrolled in a party (independent), you may still vote in a primary. You ask for the party ballot you prefer. When you request a party ballot you automatically become listed as a member of that party.

May I change party identification?

If you want to change parties or drop your membership in a party after a primary, you may do so immediately after voting by filling out a card which is available at the polls and returning it to the registrars of voters. You may change your party enrollment in person or by mail at any time.