



The Disability Vote Matters:

Exercising Your Right To Vote

Voting is a fundamental right, privilege, and duty. It is also a key means to make your voice heard. For people with disabilities, voting is particularly important to assure that our politicians and elected officials work to protect and advance the rights and interests of the disability community.

The law is evolving to change how people with disabilities can vote. Pennsylvania amended its election law in October 2019 and again in March 2020 to make it easier to register to vote and to cast a ballot. This Fact Sheet will describe Pennsylvania's rules for registration and voting.

Registering to Vote

You cannot vote in Pennsylvania unless you first register to vote. You can register to vote in Pennsylvania if:

- you will be a United States citizen for at least 30 days before the next election; and
- you will be a resident of Pennsylvania and your election district for at least 30 days before the next election; and
- you will be at least 18 years of age on the day of the next election.

You may register to vote in Pennsylvania regardless of whether you have a court-appointed guardian due to a disability or if you have a disability that impairs your cognitive functioning.

You may register to vote in Pennsylvania if you are a college student who attends college in Pennsylvania.


You may register to vote if you are in prison for reasons other than for conviction of a felony (for instance, if you are awaiting trial or are in prison for a misdemeanor conviction). Convicted felons may register to vote and cast their ballot once they have been released from prison, including people who are in halfway houses to complete their prison terms or people who are on probation or parole.

There are several ways you can register to vote in Pennsylvania:

- You can register online by completing the information at <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/VoterRegistrationApplication.aspx>. To register online, you must have a Pennsylvania driver's license or photo identification number.
- You can complete a voter registration form and submit it to your County Board of Elections by mail. You can get an English language copy of that form at https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/documents/VoterApplication_English.pdf or a Spanish language copy at <https://www.votespa.com/Register-to-Vote/Documents/VRMA%20Spanish.pdf>. The voter registration form should be available soon in Chinese and Vietnamese. You can use the last four digits of your Social Security number as identification when you register using this form if you do not have a Pennsylvania driver's license or photo identification number.
- You can complete a voter registration form in person at your County Board of Elections office. You can find contact information for your County Board of Elections by calling **1-877-VOTESPA** or visiting <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>.
- You can register to vote at any PennDOT photo or driver's license office and at many state and local government services offices, including, for instance, County Assistance Offices, Area Agencies on Aging, County Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Offices, and Centers for Independent Living. For more information on those options visit <https://www.votespa.com/Register-to-Vote/Pages/How-to-Register-to-Vote.aspx#online>.



**POLLING
STATION**



Once your voter registration application is submitted, your County Board of Elections will review and process it. If you do not receive a voter registration card within 14 days, contact your County Board of Elections. You can get contact information for your County Board of Election by calling 1-877-VOTESPA or by visiting

<https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>. You can also check online to see if your voter registration was successfully processed by visiting <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx>.

Because polling place assignments are based on where you live and Absentee Ballots and Mail-In Ballots are sent to your address, it is important that your registration reflects your current address. If you move to another place in Pennsylvania, you can use the same registration forms and processes discussed above to change your address.

The **deadline** for submitting a voter registration form is **15 days before Election Day**. This means that your voter registration form must be **received** by your County Board of Elections no later than midnight on the 15th day prior to Election Day.

Voting in Person

If you're registered to vote, you can vote in person at your assigned polling place. Many Pennsylvania polling places are accessible to people who use wheelchairs or have other physical disabilities (or they deploy technology and equipment, such as temporary ramps, on Election Days for accessibility). But, unfortunately, some polling places remain inaccessible. To find out the location of your polling place and whether it is accessible, you can visit

<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx> or contact your County Board of Elections. For contact information for your County Board of Election call **1-877-PAVOTES** or visit <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>

You will need to present identification to vote at your polling place only if are a first-time voter or are voting for the first time at a new polling place. For more information on Voter ID requirements, review DRP's publication on [Voter I.D. Requirements and Election Day Issues](#).

If you need assistance to cast your ballot at your polling place due to visual or physical disabilities or difficulty with reading or writing, you can have someone assist you to vote. You can be assisted by anyone **except** the Judge of Elections, your union representative, or your employer. In order to receive assistance, you should note the need for assistance on your voter registration form (which will then be included with your information in the polling book). If you did not indicate a need for assistance on your registration form so it is not noted in the polling book, you may still receive assistance by completing a "Declaration of Need of Assistance" form at the polling place stating your name and address, the name and address of the person rendering assistance, and the reason for assistance.

For more information about issues relating to physical accessibility, communications access, and reasonable accommodations while voting in person, review [DRP's Fact Sheets on Voting by People with Disabilities - Ensuring Participation for All Citizens and Disability Voting Issues - Access, Assistance, and Accommodations](#).

Alternatives to In-Person Voting

Pennsylvania has several alternatives to voting in-person at your polling place. The most recent, voting by **Mail-In Ballot**, is now available to almost all voters and will likely be the most popular option. Voting by **Absentee Ballot** or **Alternative Ballot** technically remain options for some people with disabilities, but they impose burdens that the Mail-In Ballot does not. In addition, there may be circumstances when it is too late to seek any of these options. In those circumstances, voters may be able to vote by applying for an **Emergency Absentee Ballot** or **Emergency Alternative Ballot**.

1. Voting By Mail-In Ballot

Until October 2019, Pennsylvania allowed voting by mail only for individuals who qualified to vote by Absentee Ballot or Alternative Ballot. In October 2019, Pennsylvania enacted Act 77 which created the Mail-In Ballot process. The Mail-In Ballot process enables qualified voters to vote by mail without offering any reasons or excuses for why they want to do so.

Initially, the Mail-In Ballot process could not be used by individuals who were eligible to vote by Absentee Ballot, including individuals with illness or disabilities that prevented them from going to their polling places and voting in person.

In March 2020, Pennsylvania enacted Act 12 which changed the rules for Mail-In Ballot eligibility. Under Act 12, almost all qualified, registered voters can now vote by Mail-In Ballot, including those who are also eligible to vote by Absentee Ballot such as voters with illnesses or disabilities that prevent them from voting in person. Because an applicant for a Mail-In Ballot need not disclose personal information about his disability, doctor, or occupation, most voters with disabilities will now want to use the Mail-In Ballot process rather than the Absentee Ballot process.

In late March 2020, Pennsylvania enacted Act 12 which changed the rules for Mail-In Ballot eligibility. Under Act 12, almost all qualified, registered voters can now vote by Mail-In Ballot, including those who are also eligible to vote by Absentee Ballot such as voters with illnesses or disabilities that prevent them from voting in person. Because an applicant for a Mail-In Ballot need not disclose personal information about his disability, doctor, or occupation, most voters with disabilities will now want to use the Mail-In Ballot process rather than the Absentee Ballot process.

To vote by Mail-In Ballot, you must first apply. You can apply to vote by Mail-In Ballot online, by mail, or in person.

- You can apply online to vote by Mail-In Ballot by visiting <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/OnlineAbsenteeApplication/#/OnlineAbsenteeBegin> . You currently will need a valid Pennsylvania driver's license or photo identification to apply online.
- You can apply to vote by Mail-In Ballot by completing an application form and mailing it to your County Board of Elections. The English language Mail-In Ballot application can be accessed at https://www.votespa.com/Register-to-Vote/Documents/PADOS_MailInApplication.pdf.
- You can apply to vote by Mail-In Ballot in person at your County Board of Elections. For contact information for your County Board of Election call 1-877-PAVOTES or visit <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>.

If you apply to vote by Mail-In Ballot, the application form will ask whether you would like to submit an annual Mail-In Ballot request. If you check that box, you will receive Mail-In Ballots for the remaining elections during that year and you will be sent applications for Mail-In Ballots automatically in subsequent years. You will still need to submit the applications in subsequent years to be able to vote by Mail-In Ballot, but the application will be sent automatically by the first Monday in February and, once approved, you will receive Mail-In Ballots to vote in all elections during that year.

The **deadline** to apply for a Mail-In ballot is **5:00 p.m. on the Tuesday prior to Election Day**. This means that your application must be **received** in the County Board of Elections office by that date and time. If something arises after this deadline that prevents you from voting in person, you will need to apply for an Emergency Absentee Ballot or Emergency Alternative Ballot as discussed below.

After you submit your application for a Mail-In Ballot, the County Board of Elections will send you a ballot to vote (once the ballot has been finalized and printed). The **deadline** for submitting your completed Mail-In Ballot to the County Board of Elections is **8:00 p.m. on Election Day**. This means that the County Board of Elections must **receive** the completed ballot by that date and time.

If you deliver your application for a Mail-In Ballot to your County Board of Elections in person during regular business hours, you can ask to receive the ballot while you are at the office. Upon receiving that request, the County Board of Elections must give you the requested ballot at that time (if the ballot has been finalized and printed) unless there is a bona fide objection to your application. Upon receipt of the ballot at the County Board of Elections office, you should be allowed to complete it at the office if you choose and staff must provide you with a place to privately mark the ballot. If you choose not to complete it at that time, you must assure that the County Board of Elections receives your completed ballot no later than **8:00 p.m. on Election Day**.

2. Voting by Absentee Ballot

Although all voters who qualify to vote by Absentee Ballot are now permitted to vote by Mail-In Ballot, the Absentee Ballot process technically remains an available option for those who are eligible, including: (1) individuals who will be absent from the municipality on the date of the election due to job duties; (2) members of the military; (3) individuals observing religious holidays; (4) individuals away from home at school, college, or university; (5) individuals who are incarcerated (unless it is due to a felony conviction); and (6) individuals who have illnesses or physical disabilities that prevent them from voting in person.

As detailed in the prior section, a person who applies to vote by Absentee Ballot because he has an illness or disability that prevents him from voting in person will be required to disclose the nature of his illness or disability, the name and contact information for his doctor, and his occupation. This information is not required if the person applies to vote by Mail-In Ballot, so we expect that most voters with disabilities will now use the Mail-In Ballot process if they choose not to vote in person.

If you want to apply for an Absentee Ballot, you can do so online, <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/OnlineAbsenteeApplication/#/OnlineAbsenteeBegin>; by mail, https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Documents/Absentee_Ballot_Application.pdf; or in person at your County Board of Elections. For contact information for your County Board of Election call 1-877-PAVOTES or visit <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>.

If you choose to use the Absentee Ballot process rather than the Mail-In Ballot process and have a permanent illness or physical disability that prevents you from voting in person, then you may use the Absentee Ballot application form to request an annual Absentee Ballot. To qualify for an annual Absentee Ballot, you must submit a physician's certification (which is on the application form). Once you are approved for an annual Absentee Ballot, you will receive ballots to vote for the remainder of the year and you will be sent applications to renew your request for Absentee Ballots in subsequent years by the first Monday in February. You do not need to submit a physician's certification after the initial application. Again, though, if you apply for a Mail-In Ballot you can receive annual mail-in ballots without providing any of this information.



After you submit your application for an Absentee Ballot, the County Board of Elections will send you a ballot to vote (once the ballot has been finalized and printed). The **deadline** for submitting your completed Absentee Ballot to the County Board of Elections is **8:00 p.m. on Election Day**. This means that the County Board of Elections must **receive** the completed ballot by that date and time.

If you deliver your application for an Absentee Ballot to your County Board of Elections in person during regular business hours, you can ask to receive the ballot while you are at the office. Upon receiving that request, the County Board of Elections must give you the requested ballot at that time (if the ballot has been finalized and printed) unless there is a bona fide objection to your application. Upon receipt of the ballot at the County Board of Elections office, you should be allowed to complete it at the office if you choose and staff must provide you with a place to privately mark the ballot. If you choose not to complete it at that time, you must assure that the County Board of Elections receives your completed ballot no later than **8:00 p.m. on Election Day**.

4. Voting by Emergency Absentee Ballot

If after the deadline to apply for a Mail-In Ballot or Absentee Ballot you become ill or something comes up that requires you to be out of town on Election Day, you are eligible to vote by Emergency Absentee Ballot. You can get an application for an Emergency Absentee Ballot at <https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Documents/Emergency%20Absentee%20Application.pdf> or by contacting your County Board of Elections. For contact information for your County Board of Election call 1-877-PAVOTES or visit <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>. The Emergency Absentee Ballot application must be notarized. The **deadline** to apply for Emergency Absentee Ballot is **5:00 p.m. on the Friday before Election Day**. This means that the County Board of Elections must receive your application by that date and time.

If the emergency arises after between 5:00 p.m. on the Friday before Election Day and the close of polls at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, you can file a request for an Emergency Absentee Ballot in the Court of Common Pleas. You will need to complete the following form <https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Documents/EmergencyAbsenteeApplication-After5onFriday.pdf>. For more information about that process, you should contact your County Board of Elections.



5. Voting by Alternative Ballot or Emergency Alternative Ballot

The federal Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act requires Pennsylvania to offer voters the opportunity to vote by Alternative Ballot if they are: (a) are age 65 or older and/or have a disability, and (b) are assigned to an inaccessible polling place. To determine if your polling place is inaccessible, visit

<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx> or contact your County Board of Elections. For contact information for your County Board of Election call 1-877-PAVOTES or visit <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx>.

NOTE: Because of the recent changes to Pennsylvania law described previously, you may not need to vote by Alternative Ballot if you have a disability and are assigned to an inaccessible polling place. Before 2020, the Alternative Ballot process was the only means by which voters with disabilities could submit their votes up until the close of polls on Election Day because Absentee Ballots had to be submitted by the Friday before Election Day and Mail-In Ballots did not exist. Due to the changes in the law, voters with disabilities can now vote by Mail-In Ballot and submit it up until the close of polls on Election Day. Still, the Alternative Ballot remains available in Pennsylvania for older people and those with disabilities assigned to inaccessible polling places who want to use it.

You must submit your application for an Alternative Ballot by mail or in person at your County Board of Elections. You can get a copy of an application for an Alternative Ballot at https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Documents/Alternative_Ballot_Application.pdf or by contacting your County Board of Elections.

The **deadline** to apply for an Alternative Ballot is **5:00 p.m. on the Tuesday before Election Day**. This means that the County Board of Elections must **receive** the application by that date and time. Once your application is approved, the County Board of Elections will send you an Alternative Ballot to complete. The **deadline** to submit your completed Alternative Ballot is **8:00 p.m. on Election Day**. This means that the County Board of Election must **receive** your completed ballot by that date and time.

In the event of emergency (for instance, where you did not realize that your polling place was inaccessible), you can submit an Emergency Application for Alternative Ballot at your County Board of Elections by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. You can get an Emergency Application at https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Documents/Emerg_Alternative_Ballot.pdf or by contacting your County Board of Elections. You can find contact information for your County Board of Elections at 1-877-PAVOTES or visit <https://www.votespa.com/Resources/Pages/Contact-Your-Election-Officials.aspx> You may also authorize a representative to deliver an Emergency Alternative Ballot to you. Contact your County Board of Elections for more information.

Stay Connected

If you need more information or need help, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) at [800-692-7443](tel:800-692-7443) (voice) or [877-375-7139](tel:877-375-7139) (TDD). Our email address is: intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

The mission of Disability Rights Pennsylvania is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Due to our limited resources, Disability Rights Pennsylvania cannot provide individual services to every person with advocacy and legal issues. Disability Rights Pennsylvania prioritizes cases that have the potential to result in widespread, systemic changes to benefit persons with disabilities. While we cannot provide assistance to everyone, we do seek to provide every individual with information and referral options.

IMPORTANT: This publication is for general informational purposes only. This publication is not intended, nor should be construed, to create an attorney-client relationship between Disability Rights Pennsylvania and any person. Nothing in this publication should be considered to be legal advice.

PLEASE NOTE: For information in alternative formats or a language other than English, contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania at 800-692-7443, Ext. 400, TDD: 877-375-7139 or intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

For Election Day Assistance, call our
hotline at 1.800.692.7443

or,

For more resources like this, visit
www.DisabilityRightsPA.org/resources
or scan here:



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