

Uniformed Services/Family Members Frequently Asked Questions



Can I vote absentee?

You can vote absentee in local, state and Federal elections if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are an active duty member of the Armed Forces, Merchant Marine, Public Health Service, NOAA, a family member of the above, or a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States.

Do I have to be registered to vote absentee?

You can vote absentee in local, state and Federal elections if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are an active duty member of the Armed Forces, Merchant Marine, Public Health Service, NOAA, a family member of the above, or a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States.

How do I register to vote or request an absentee ballot?

You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form: The Federal Post Card Application. This application form is accepted by all states and territories and is postage- paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System and State Department Pouch mail. Hard copies of the form can be obtained from your installation's Voting Assistance Officer or requested directly from the Federal Voting Assistance Program by contacting us.

An online version of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form is also available. The online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage, or mailed using our prepaid return envelope.

Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official. How do I register to vote, or apply for an absentee ballot?

Where is my "legal voting residence"?

For voting purposes, "legal voting residence" can be the state or territory where you last resided prior to entering military service OR the state or territory that you have since claimed as your legal residence.

Even though you may no longer maintain formal ties to that residence, the address determines your proper voting jurisdiction. To claim a new legal residence, you must have simultaneous physical presence and the intent to return to that location as your primary residence.

Uniformed Service members and their eligible dependents may change their legal residence every time they

change permanent duty stations, or they may retain their legal residence without change. This may mean that the Uniformed Service member has a different legal voting residence than his/her family members. A Judge Advocate General officer or legal counsel should be consulted before legal residence is changed because there are usually other factors that should be considered besides voting.

Can I vote in-person where I am stationed?

Uniformed Service members may vote in the U.S. state or territory where stationed if they change their legal residence to that state or territory, even if they live on a military installation. Be advised that there may be legal obligations, such as taxation, if you change your state of residence. Therefore, consult a Judge Advocate General officer or legal counsel before making such a decision.

Currently there are no provisions for personnel stationed outside the U.S. to vote in-person where stationed.

My family members are not in the military; can they also vote absentee?

Yes. Eligible spouses and children (U.S. citizens, 18 years or older) of Uniformed Service personnel may vote absentee. Some states allow children of military personnel residing overseas who are U.S. citizens but who have never resided in the U.S. to claim one of their U.S. citizen parent's legal state of residence as their own. Check out our list of states allowing this.

If I am required to have election materials notarized, how do I do it?

Notarization can be performed by a Voting Assistance Officer, U.S. Commissioned Officer, embassy or consular officer, or other official authorized to administer oaths. Most states and territories do not require notarization of voting materials; therefore consult your state's requirements.

Where do I send my Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request?

Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official. These officials will handle the processing and distribution of your absentee ballots and may need to contact you for further information or clarification. To facilitate this process, please provide a current email address, phone and fax number on your application.

When mailing election materials to my state or territory, do I have to pay postage?

When mailed from any U.S. post office, U.S. embassy or consulate, or APO/FPO mail facility, the hardcopy voter registration/absentee ballot form is postage-paid. In order to receive free postage, the online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope printed with our postage-free envelope template. You may mail the completed form in an envelope with proper postage affixed. Ensure that your form is postmarked (see postmarking instructions below) and sent to arrive before your state's specific deadline. You must pay postage if the materials are mailed from a non-U.S. postal facility.

What is a postmark and how do I make sure I get one?

A postmark is a postal marking made on a piece of mail indicating the date and time that the item was accepted by the postal service. Postmarks are used to determine if voting materials have been mailed by state deadlines. Due to varying mail pick up times, the day you 'mail' your election mail may not be the day the postal facility postmarks it.

You may ask the mail clerk to hand stamp the election material so that a date is clearly visible. In certain situations a handwritten postmark and signature from you or a notarizing official may be sufficient.

When is the best time to apply for an absentee ballot?

We recommend that you register to vote/request an absentee ballot in January of each year, or at least 45 days before Election Day.

Must I submit a separate application for each election?

A citizen does not need to submit a separate application for each election since the states and territories accept the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form as a request for all Federal office elections for a period of two general elections.

To ensure that you receive absentee ballots for all elections in which you are eligible to vote, we recommend that you submit a new Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request in January of each year and whenever you have a new mailing address. If you are requesting an absentee ballot for a specific election, note in Block 6

the election for which you are requesting the ballot, i.e., "Primary (or Special, or General) election only".

When should I receive my ballot?

Most states and territories begin mailing ballots 30-45 days before an election. If you have not received your ballot two weeks before the election, contact your local election official (contact information available on most state election sites). If you encounter problems contacting your local election official, contact us. Always complete and return your absentee ballot regardless of when you receive it, even if you have already submitted a back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (explanation below). Your local election official will ensure that only one of the ballots is counted.

What happens if I do not receive a ballot from my local election office?

If you requested an absentee ballot but have not received one close to election day, you can still vote by using the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). In order to be eligible to use this back-up ballot, you must:

Be absent from your voting residence;

Have applied for a regular ballot early enough so the request is received by the appropriate local election official not later than the State deadline; or the date that is 30 days before the general election; AND

Have not received the requested regular absentee ballot from the state.

Where can I get a back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot?

Hardcopies of the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) are available through Voting Assistance Officers at military installations or at U.S. embassies/consulates.

An online version is also available, which must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and mailed to your local election official. Check out your state specific instructions, witness/notary requirements, deadlines, and mailing addresses.

Your Voting Assistance Officer:

Name: _____ Location: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____