

What is the Value of Your Vote?

It's your responsibility to take care of your children, to maintain your home, keep your car running and your grass mowed. There are probably a host of other things that you can name, too. But what about your civic duty? If you don't vote, elected officials might not care what you think because they have a different agenda than yours.

So what value do you place on your right to vote? Is voting a priority for you? Is it worth planning for contingencies? We think so. That's why Operation Wildfire has devoted this issue to mail ballots, your insurance policy to protect your right to vote.

If you're one of our many readers from out of state, please contact your state and/or county elections office for information on how you can apply for a mail ballot. For example, our New Jersey readers can apply for a mail ballot at the New Jersey Information Portal: <https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/vote-by-mail.shtml>. Most of the instructions are similar to those outlined below for Pennsylvania voters.

Why Should You Vote by Mail?

- You don't take your right to vote for granted.
- You want to have input in selecting those who represent us.
- You want a contingency plan to ensure that your voice is heard – because something always comes up at the last minute that prevents you from getting to the polls.
- You can vote in the quiet convenience of your home.
- Voting by mail ballot enables you to volunteer on Election Day.
- You won't need to stand in line on Election Day.

It's easy to vote by mail in Pennsylvania:

How to Apply¹

- You must be registered to vote. Check your Pennsylvania voter registration status here: <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/voterregistrationstatus.aspx>

If you aren't registered to vote, complete the online voter registration. Your application will be sent to your county election office. When your application is received and processed, you'll receive a voter registration card in the mail. The card will identify your polling place. Be sure to check that all information is accurate. If it isn't, contact your county election office.

- In Pennsylvania, you have two options for mail ballots.
 - **Mail-in ballot** – Any qualified voter may apply for a mail-in ballot. You may simply request this ballot without a reason.
 - **Absentee ballot** – If you plan to be out of the municipality on Election Day or if you have a disability or illness that prevents you from going to your polling place, you can request this ballot type, which requires you to list a reason for your ballot.
- To request a no-excuse mail ballot or an absentee ballot, visit <https://www.vote.pa.gov/Voting-in-PA/Pages/Mail-and-Absentee-Ballot.aspx>
 - You may also request a mail ballot from your county election office. In Centre County, the office is located at 420 Holmes Street in Bellefonte.
- Your request must be received by your county election office by 5:00 p.m. on October 31, 2023.

¹ Pennsylvania Department of State, Voting and Election Information, www.vote.pa.gov

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How to Complete Your Ballot²

- When ballots in your county are finalized and printed, you'll receive your ballot in the mail.
- Read the instructions carefully and mark your ballot. Be sure to complete the front and back of each page.
- Enclose and seal your ballot in the inner secrecy envelope that indicates "official election ballot" or it will not be counted. Do not make any marks on the envelope.
- Seal the inner secrecy envelope in the pre-addressed outer return envelope. **Sign and date the voter's declaration on the outside of the outer return envelope.** If you do not complete the declaration on the return envelope your ballot will not be counted.

How to Return Your Voted Ballot³

- Return your voted ballot to your county election office.
 - **You can mail your ballot.**
 - Using the return envelope supplied with your ballot, make sure you use the proper postage (if needed) and that it arrives to your county election office by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
 - Postmarks do not count. If your ballot is not received by the county election office by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, it will not be counted.
 - **You can hand-deliver your ballot** before 8:00 p.m. on Election Day to your county election office. In Centre County, the election office is located at 420 Holmes Street, Bellefonte.
 - Some counties may have **drop boxes**. Voters may return their mail-in or absentee ballot at one of these locations.
- Absentee and Mail-in Ballots must be received by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day at your county election office.

Can I Return Voted Ballots Other Than My Own?⁴

No. On its face, it seems harmless. A family member, friend or volunteer from a community group or political party offers to take your ballot to a drop box or county elections office, maybe because you don't have a car or have trouble getting around on your own. But in Pennsylvania, "ballot harvesting" is illegal. **Only a voter can mail their ballot or return it in person.**

The only exception to this is for a voter with a disability that prevents them from applying in person for their mail ballot or delivering their mail ballot.

- **Third Party Ballot Application and/or Ballot Delivery**
A disabled voter may designate an agent to deliver his/her ballot materials for them. The agent must be designated in writing using a special authorization form. We found the form at this link:
<https://www.vote.pa.gov/Resources/Documents/Authorize-Designated-Agent-for-Mail-in-or-Absentee-Ballot.pdf>

Can You Return Your Voted Mail-In or Absentee Ballot at Your Polling Place?⁵

- No.
- If you received a mail ballot but did not complete it, you may surrender your **unvoted** mail ballot, along with both envelopes, at your polling place and vote a regular ballot.
- If you did vote your mail ballot and returned it to your county board of elections, you are not eligible to vote at your polling place.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Votebeat

⁵ Pennsylvania Department of State, Voting and Election Information, www.vote.pa.org

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- If you requested a mail ballot but did not receive it, or you do not have it to surrender at your polling place, you may vote by provisional ballot at your polling place. The procedure for voting a provisional ballot is different than other forms of voting. Follow the instructions from the Election Judge.

Can You Vote Early in Person?⁶

If you want to vote early in-person during an election, check your county's website or call your local county elections office to see if ballots are available and printed. If ballots are ready, be sure to have proof of identification with you, such as a PennDot ID or the last four digits of your Social Security Number, when you arrive at your county elections office.

Here's how easy it is to vote early in person:

- Go to your county election office.
- Complete a mail-in ballot request form on site and wait for it to be verified.
- Receive and mark your ballot following the instructions provided.
- Seal your marked ballot in the white inner secrecy envelope labeled "official ballot." Your ballot **MUST** be in the secrecy envelope to be counted.
- Seal the white smaller secrecy envelope inside the pre-addressed larger, outer return envelope. Your ballot **MUST** be in both envelopes to be counted.
- Sign and date the voter declaration on the back of the outer return envelope.
- Hand it back to your local county election office for processing.

Registered Pennsylvania voters may vote early in person at their county elections office up to and including October 31, 2023.

Why Your Vote Matters

- **The Pennsylvania Courts.**
 - Your vote matters because the citizens of Pennsylvania deserve and need Judges who will interpret the law fairly and objectively based on facts and by following legal precedent and practice, never legislating from the bench.
- **Change begins in our community.**
 - The fight for social change often begins small in our communities, shaping policy from the ground up. This year, we'll vote for leaders who will influence parks and recreation, public transportation, safety (police and fire departments), school rules, regulations and curriculum (education), taxes and public works.
- **Elected leaders are chosen by those who vote.**
 - Voter turnout is historically low in Municipal Elections. If you don't vote, your voice with elected leaders is diminished. When you do, your vote keeps our elected officials accountable.
- **Many people fought and died for your right to vote.**
 - From the American Revolution up to including present day conflicts, people have fought, and many have died, to ensure your right to vote.
 - The right to vote is fundamental to our Constitutional Republic.

Operation Wildfire hopes that we've convinced you to apply for an Election Day insurance policy, your mail-in ballot. Show your family, friends, neighbors and coworkers that you value your right to vote. Apply for a mail-in ballot today, and encourage them to do the same!

⁶ <https://vote.pa/info/early/>

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