

BALLOTS WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

A Guide for Absentee Voting

Absentee voting, also known as mail-in voting, stands as a vital pillar of inclusivity in our electoral process. It serves as an alternative way of voting for citizens with challenges that prohibit them from physically reporting to the polls. From seniors navigating mobility limitations to individuals managing health concerns or juggling demanding schedules, absentee voting ensures that every eligible voter can exercise their democratic right without physical boundaries. This guide is designed to provide advice to those choosing to vote from afar.

- **Make sure you're registered to vote.** Absentee ballot requests from unregistered voters will not be granted. If you're unsure about your registration status, you can check it on the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter page online, or you can call or visit the local elections office.
- **You must initiate the absentee voting process.** In order to vote by mail, voters must request an absentee ballot. These applications are good for in most cases for a single election. The exception, however, is for the elderly and disabled. Those voters can opt to have absentee ballots sent to them for an entire election cycle, or 1 year. If you wish to do that, note that you must check the "elderly" or "disabled" box as applicable on the back of the application. You must also repeat the application process every year. For example, if you requested an absentee ballot for a runoff in January 2024, you will automatically receive absentee ballots for all subsequent elections in 2024. However, you would need to submit another request in January 2025 (and every year following) to continue receiving absentee ballots.
- **No reason necessary.** Some states require voters to disclose a "valid reason" to determine eligibility for absentee voting. Georgia is not one of those states.
- **Be prepared to declare a party—in some cases.** If you're voting in a primary election, you'll have to choose a Republican, Democrat, or Non-Partisan absentee ballot. (If that race goes to a runoff, you will not be allowed to "switch parties.") Party-specific ballots are **not** required for general elections.
- **Keep time in mind.** Absentee ballots may be requested any time between 78 and 11 calendar days prior to Election Day. If you request the ballot be mailed out to you, election officials (at the local and state levels) have up to 3 business days to do so.
- **Request it.** You can download, print, and upload your absentee ballot application, along with your preferred delivery method, from the My Voter page, or you can call or visit the local elections office to request your ballot be sent to you via U.S. Postal Service.
- **Fill it out carefully.** As with any type of voting, do your research on the issues and candidates. (You can brush up on these by reviewing your sample ballot on the My Voter page.) When you're ready to complete your ballot, do so in **ink**. No pencils allowed. **Most importantly, be sure to sign it.** Lack of signature is the one of the most common reasons for absentee ballot rejections.

- You might need to provide a copy of your photo ID. If you've never voted before, you'll need to provide one with your absentee ballot. Acceptable forms include: any state or federal government-issued photo ID; a free photo ID issued by the county's registration office or the Georgia Department of Driver Services; a Georgia driver's license (even if it's expired); a student photo ID from a public Georgia college or university; a valid county, state, or federal government employee photo ID; a valid U.S. passport; a valid military photo ID; and a valid tribal photo ID.

- Return it. You can do that in a variety of ways. Your first option is to return it to a staff member in person during regular business hours or on Election Day. **Should you choose to hand deliver it on Election Day, you must take it to the elections office in Swainsboro instead of your precinct.** Secondly, you can place your ballot into the drop box at the elections office during early voting. Finally, you can always send back your ballot by U.S. mail, but you'll have to provide your own stamp. (However, a privacy envelope as well as a return envelope will be provided to you.)

- Know that absentee voting is final. Once you've completed and returned your ballot, you cannot vote again by any other method (like early voting or on Election Day) for any reason. However, if you make a mistake, a new ballot can be provided. You just need to yield the "spoiled" ballot to either the local or state elections office.

- Verify that your ballot has been accepted. The "Absentee Ballot Request Information" on the My Voter page will update your ballot status accordingly. If your ballot was rejected for some reason, the elections office will contact you with a corrective action document.

- Reach out to the elections office if you never receive your absentee ballot. The staff will talk to you about your options.

- The absentee process includes special quicker, reliable provisions for military members and their families as well as overseas citizens. Qualified voters can use the same absentee channels and processes presented in this guide so far; just be sure to check the "military" box on the back. However, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act (UOCAVA) allows for your ballot to be provided a week earlier to ensure sufficient time for your ballot to be returned stateside and counted. If you opt to utilize UOCAVA, you'll need to request and return a Federal Post Card Application (which you can also use to register, if needed) from the local elections office or the Georgia Secretary of State. If your ballot does not arrive in time to be completed and returned before the election deadline, you can use a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as a back-up. To request and return an FWAB, follow the same procedures as you would a Federal Post Card Application.

- Absentee ballots can only be picked up and completed by the voter. Requests, however, can be made by a relative in special cases, like a voter temporarily living outside the County of Emanuel. The same applies for ballot returns; a relative may do so on behalf of the voter in special circumstances.

No matter where you are or where you vote from, our democracy relies on every American doing his or her civic duty. For that reason, I encourage you to consider absentee voting as an accessible method to participate in your local, state, and federal elections. Please contact my office if you need assistance making your voice heard.

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