

The Basics of Voting By Mail in Atlantic County

In 2009 the New Jersey Legislature passed what has been referred to as the “Vote by Mail” law which has dramatically changed the rules for what we formerly referred to as absentee ballot voting. At the outset the term “absentee” ballot has been replaced with the term “mail-in” ballot, but there are real changes in the options available for voters provided by the new law.

Prior to the new law, any voter who was permanently disabled could, by way of one application, receive ballots for all elections in one calendar year. (That was option A.) A voter could also request an *application* (not a ballot) be sent to them for all November general elections. (That was option B.) Both of those options have changed.

The new option A allows *any voter* to request all of the eligible ballots for the calendar year with a single application. There is no longer a requirement for the voter to be permanently disabled.

The new option B allows any voter to request a *ballot* (not an application) sent to them for all general elections with a single application. The voter selecting this option will receive ballots for every November general election until or unless the voter requests the County Clerk’s Office to discontinue sending the ballots.

The new law also changes the rules for authorized messenger ballots. With the new law *any voter* can now apply for, and obtain, a mail-in ballot by way of an authorized messenger. Use of the authorized messenger is no longer limited to “sick or confined” voters. However, authorized messengers can only apply for, and obtain, mail-in ballots for *ten* voters in an election.

The County Clerk’s Office is responsible for publicizing the availability of mail-in ballots for an upcoming election, receiving and reviewing ballot applications for acceptability, and printing and distributing ballots. Once the ballots are voted, they are processed and counted by the Board of Elections.

APPLICATIONS FOR MAIL-IN BALLOTS

Mail-in ballots are not automatically sent to voters. A voter must apply for a mail-in ballot using the standard mail-in ballot form. Generally, a voter must submit a mail-in ballot application for each election in which he or she wishes to vote by mail-in ballot. The exceptions are the two options described above. Option A being for receiving a ballot for the all eligible elections for the calendar year and option B being for receiving a ballot for each November general election, until the voter discontinues the service.

The County Clerk’s Office keeps records of those voters who check option A and, at the beginning of each year, sends an application to them. Second, under federal law, the federal postcard application for a mail-in ballot, which is available for all military and overseas civilian voters, is good for all federal elections through the next two regularly scheduled federal elections. The federal application is available at www.fvap.gov.

The voter must be the one applying for his or her mail-in ballot. A voter may receive assistance in the completion of the application, but this should not be construed to mean that a person can fully act in the place of a voter. For example, a parent should not be completing an mail-in ballot application for a child who is away from school, including the signing of the child’s name. Any

person providing assistance in the completion of a mail-in ballot application must provide his or her name, address and signature on the application.

THE DEADLINE

An application for an mail-in ballot may be mailed to the County Clerk up until seven days before an election. After that, a voter must request a mail-in ballot in person at the County Clerk's Office in Mays Landing, up to 3 PM on the day before an election. After that time, only a court can authorize issuance of a mail-in ballot.

MESSENGER MAIL-IN BALLOTS

Any voter may designate a person to be an "authorized messenger" to deliver the application and pick up a mail-in ballot for the voter from the County Clerk's Office. The mail-in ballot application provides a place whereby the vote can, by his or her signature, name the person to act as the authorized messenger for the ballot.

The authorized messenger must be a family member of the voter or a registered voter in Atlantic County. The authorized messenger must sign the certification on the mail-in ballot application in which he or she certifies that the ballot will be delivered directly to the voter and to no other person.

The authorized messenger must show a photo identification to the County Clerk's election staff when the application is delivered and must sign the certification on the ballot in the presence of the County Clerk's election staff. No messenger can apply for and obtain more than ten ballots for voters.

APPLICATIONS FOR MAIL-IN BALLOTS MAY BE REJECTED

The County Clerk is responsible for reviewing mail-in ballot applications for acceptability. The Clerk must ascertain that the person submitting the application is a registered voter and that the signature on the application compares favorably with the one on record with the County Superintendent of Elections.

Where an applicant's address differs from the registered address in the voter registration records, but is still in Atlantic County, the application is considered notice from the voter of a change of address. The ballot can be sent to the new address and the voter records will be changed to reflect the new address by the Superintendent of Elections Office.

Failure to provide a signature and an address are also grounds for rejection. The County Clerk's Office notifies all voters who have had a rejected application.

FIRST TIME VOTERS

Voters who registered to vote by mail may be required to provide identification to complete his or her registration if they have not already done so. That identification may be a driver's license number, the last four digits of his or her social security number, or a copy of some other identifying document. Voters in this category who apply for a mail-in ballot will receive a notice with their ballot to provide identification.

Voters who registered after January 1, 2006 will also have to provide identification information. These applicants must provide his or her driver's license number or a MVC non-driver ID and the last four digits of his or her social security number.

For mail-in ballot applicants in either of these categories, copies of the identifying documents must be included and returned with their ballots.

HOW TO VOTE WITH A MAIL-IN BALLOT

After an mail-in ballot application has been approved, an mail-in ballot packet is mailed or handed to the voter or the authorized messenger by the County Clerk's election staff. The packet will include the ballot, two envelopes (known as "inner" and "outer" envelopes) and any additional instructions. The ballot will be specific to the voter's district and contain all local candidates and public questions which pertain to that district. In the case of a Primary Election, a voter who is affiliated with a political party will receive a ballot pertaining to that political party. Unaffiliated voters will receive both a Republican and a Democratic ballot, but may only vote one. Once that voter submits the chosen ballot, he or she will be listed on the voter registration records as a member of that political party.

The voted ballot should be placed into the "inner" security envelope, sealed, signed and the placed into the "outer" envelope which has the Board of Elections address on the front, ready to be mailed or delivered to the Board of Elections.

COMPLETION OF THE MAIL-IN BALLOT

All completed mail-in ballots must be delivered or mailed to the County Board of Elections. No ballots can be delivered to the polling place on Election Day. Any voter can have another person mail or deliver the ballot to the Board of Elections Office. Any voter can have another voter mail or deliver the ballot to the Board of Elections. However, the voter cannot give the ballot to that person, who is known as the "bearer" unless the bearer section on the outside of the outer envelope is completed. The bearer must provide his or her name, address and signature on the envelope. This must be completed even in the bearer is simply dropping the ballot in a mailbox.

No bearer can give the ballot to another person. The designated bearer must personally mail the ballot or take it to the Board of Elections. The bearer does not have to be the same person as the authorized messenger. Any person who delivers a mail-in ballot to the Board of Elections will be asked to sign the "bearer book", even if it is the voter.

ALL BALLOTS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN THE TIME OF THE CLOSE OF THE POLLS ON ELECTION DAY.

The County Clerk's election staff will be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the mail-in ballot process. They can be reached at 609-625-4011, Option 6.

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Atlantic County Clerk