

Frequently Asked Questions

California – General Election 2026

Last Updated: 10/21/2026

Disclaimer: This guide is designed for informational purposes only. It is not legal advice and is not intended to create an attorney-client relationship. The Election Protection Coalition does not warrant any information contained in this guide, nor does the Coalition suggest that the information in this guide should be used as a basis to pursue legal advice or decision-making. Copying and distribution of this guide for purposes other than approved Election Protection use is prohibited.

Note: This FAQ is not exhaustive. Situations or inquiries may arise that are not answered below. In those circumstances, contact your hotline captain or command center for assistance. Please make sure to record all of the voter's contact information should follow-up be necessary.

VOTER REGISTRATION	ELECTION DAY	EARLY VOTE	VOTE BY MAIL
ABSENTEE	POLLING PLACE ISSUES	ACCESSIBILITY /ASSISTANCE	STATE SPECIFIC SUPPLEMENT

Table of Contents

VOTER REGISTRATION

1. **ELIGIBILITY:** Can I register to vote?
2. **PRIMARY ELECTION:** Can I vote in the primary election? Do I need to be registered with a political party? Can I change my party registration to vote in another party's primary election? When I voted, the poll worker asked my party affiliation. Are they allowed to do that?
3. **STATUS:** Am I registered to vote? What do I need to do if my name has changed since I registered? I am listed as inactive, what does that mean and what do I need to do?
4. **HOW:** How do I register to vote? Can I register online? Do I need a printer? Can I register to vote in person?
5. **IDENTIFICATION:** What ID is required to register to vote?
6. **DEADLINES:** When is/was the voter registration deadline? Are there different deadlines whether I register by mail, in-person, or online?
7. **SAME DAY:** Does my state have Same Day Registration? If so, what is the process?
8. **PERMANENT MOVE:** I have moved permanently and I didn't update my voter registration, can I vote?
9. **TEMPORARY MOVE:** I have moved temporarily. How can I vote?

10. **STUDENT:** I am a college student. Can I register to vote where I go to school? What if I am taking classes remotely? Where can I vote?
11. **LIVING ABROAD:** I am living abroad and/or serving in the military. How can I register and/or vote?
12. **CRIMINAL CONVICTION:** I have a felony criminal conviction. Can I register to vote? Does the type of conviction matter? Are there any restrictions after any misdemeanor convictions? What process (if any) is needed to restore my right to vote if it was impacted?
13. **INCARCERATED:** I am currently incarcerated. Can I register to vote? Can I vote from jail?
14. **REGISTRATION CHALLENGED:** My registration has been challenged, what should I do?

HOW TO VOTE: ELECTION DAY

15. **HOURS:** When do the polls open/close on Election Day?
16. **POLLING LOCATION:** Where do I vote on Election Day?
17. **TIME OFF WORK:** Is my employer required to give me time off to vote? Is it paid or unpaid?
18. **CLOSING:** What if the polls close when I am already in line?
19. **IDENTIFICATION:** What identification is required to vote?
20. **NO IDENTIFICATION:** Can I vote without providing identification?
21. **NOT ON ROLLS AT MY POLLING PLACE:** I am at my polling place but am not showing up on the voter registration roll. Can I vote where I am?
22. **GIVEN PROVISIONAL BALLOT:** I am being told I have to vote provisionally, what does that mean?
23. **REQUESTING PROVISIONAL BALLOT:** I am being told I can't vote, can I vote provisionally?
24. **PROVISIONAL BALLOT NEXT STEPS:** I voted a provisional ballot, what now?

HOW TO VOTE: IN-PERSON EARLY VOTING (In this state, defined as: Early Voting)

25. **AVAILABILITY:** Is there early voting in my state (whether called early voting or something else)?
26. **ELIGIBILITY:** Do I need to have a reason to vote early?
27. **WHEN:** When does early voting begin/end?
28. **WHERE:** Where do I vote during early voting?
29. **IDENTIFICATION:** What identification is required for early voting? What if I don't have an ID?
30. **ASSISTANCE:** What if I need assistance voting early in person?

HOW TO VOTE: VOTE BY MAIL (In this state, defined as: Vote by Mail)

31. **AUTOMATIC MAIL BALLOT:** Will I automatically be sent a ballot in the mail?
32. **ELIGIBILITY:** Do I need a specific reason to vote by mail?
33. **APPLICATION DEADLINE:** What is the deadline for requesting a mail-in ballot?
34. **APPLICATION ASSISTANCE:** Can someone assist me with filling out the application?
35. **APPLICATION RETURN:** How do I submit my mail-in ballot application? Can someone return it for me? Does it have to be postmarked by a specific date?
36. **IDENTIFICATION:** Are there identification requirements when I return my mail-in ballot application and/or ballot?
37. **RECEIVING MAIL BALLOT:** Does the ballot have to be sent to my home, or can I have it sent somewhere else? What if I don't have a home address or my address is a PO Box?
38. **MISSED THE APPLICATION DEADLINE:** What if I have not requested a mail-in ballot by the deadline?
39. **STATUS OF APPLICATION AND/OR BALLOT:** How can I check the status of my application and/or ballot?

40. **APPLICATION OR BALLOT REJECTED:** I learned my mail-in ballot application and/or ballot was rejected. What can I do to fix any errors or get another one?
41. **COMPLETING BALLOT:** How do I complete the mail-in ballot?
42. **ASSISTANCE COMPLETING BALLOT:** Can someone assist me in filling out my ballot?
43. **DEADLINE TO RETURN BALLOT:** What is the deadline for the ballot to be received? Does it have to be postmarked by a specific date? Can I drop it off in person?
44. **BALLOT DROP OFF LOCATIONS:** What are the locations for dropping off a ballot (instead of mailing it)?
45. **ASSISTANCE DROPPING OFF BALLOT:** Can someone else drop off my completed ballot for me?
46. **LOST OR SPOILED BALLOT:** What if I lost my mail-in ballot, made a mistake on it (spoiled it), or I received an incorrect ballot?
47. **NON-RECEIPT OF BALLOT:** What if I requested a mail-in ballot but have not received it? What are my options for voting?
48. **IN PERSON OPTION:** What if I requested or received a mail-in ballot but I want to vote in person on Election Day?

HOW TO VOTE: ABSENTEE (In this state, defined as VOTE BY MAIL)

49. **ELIGIBILITY:** Am I eligible to request an absentee ballot?
50. **APPLICATION DEADLINE:** What is the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot?
51. **IDENTIFICATION:** Are there any identification requirements?
52. **EMERGENCY:** Is there an emergency absentee ballot? If so, am I eligible?
53. **APPLICATION RETURN:** Where and how can I return my absentee ballot application? Can someone return it for me?
54. **STATUS OF APPLICATION AND/OR BALLOT:** How can I check the status of my absentee ballot application and/or absentee ballot return?
55. **APPLICATION OR BALLOT REJECTED:** I learned my absentee ballot application or ballot was rejected. How can I confirm this and what can I do to fix any errors or get another one?
56. **COMPLETING BALLOT:** How do I complete the absentee ballot?
57. **ASSISTANCE COMPLETING BALLOT:** Can someone assist me filling out the ballot?
58. **BALLOT DEADLINES:** What is the deadline for the ballot to be postmarked and/or received by, including dropping it off in person?
59. **BALLOT DROP OFF LOCATIONS:** Where can I drop off a ballot (instead of mailing it)?
60. **ASSISTANCE DROPPING OFF:** Can someone else drop off my completed ballot for me?
61. **LOST OR SPOILED:** What if I lost my absentee ballot or it is spoiled or I received an incorrect one?
62. **NON-RECEIPT OF BALLOT:** What if I requested an absentee ballot but have not received it?
63. **IN PERSON OPTION:** What if I requested an absentee ballot but I want to vote in person on Election Day?
64. **IN PERSON ABSENTEE:** Where do I vote in-person absentee? When can I do this?

POLLING PLACE ISSUES

65. **POLLING PLACE NOT OPEN:** The polling place is not open. What should I do?
66. **LONG LINES:** There are long lines at the polling place. What should I do? What if the polls are closing while I'm in line?
67. **EQUIPMENT FAILURE:** What should I do if there are equipment problems at my precinct?
68. **CAMPAIGNING:** What rules apply to people campaigning or "hanging around" my polling place? What counts as campaigning or electioneering? Can people approach me?

69. **VOTER CONDUCT:** What am I prohibited from wearing or doing in a polling place? Can I take photos inside?
70. **POLL WORKER CONDUCT:** What is a poll worker prohibited from wearing or doing in a polling place?
71. **INTIMIDATION:** Are there any other specific restrictions on conduct outside of a polling place? What should I do if I feel unsafe or uncomfortable outside the polling place?
72. **CHALLENGE:** Someone is formally challenging my vote. What should I do?
73. **POLICE/MILITARY PRESENCE:** There are police/military at the polling place. Is this okay? What should I do?
74. **THOUGHT WAS REGISTERED:** My name isn't on the voter registration roll but I thought I was registered. What should I do?
75. **PROVISIONAL BALLOT:** I have been offered a provisional ballot. What should I do? (Also see info in the [Election Day Voting](#) section above).

ACCESSIBILITY/ASSISTANCE

76. **EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE:** I don't know how to use the voting equipment. Can I get help?
77. **PHYSICAL DISABILITY:** I have a physical disability and need assistance. Is my polling place ADA compliant? Does my voting location have an accessible voting system?
78. **READING/LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE:** I am blind, have a physical disability, or cannot read English and require assistance in order to vote. Can I get assistance at the polls?
79. **LANGUAGE ACCESS:** I am not an English speaker. What language resources are available? Can I bring someone in the booth to help me understand the ballot?
80. **CURBSIDE VOTING:** Is curbside voting available? How do I request it?
81. **VOTER GUIDE:** Can I bring a voting guide or reference notes with me into the voting booth?

STATE SPECIFIC SUPPLEMENT (Anything that is particular/unique about voting in this state that is not captured elsewhere in the document.)

82. **VOTING WHILE UNHOUSED:** I'm currently unhoused, how do I vote?
83. **QUESTIONS:** Who should I contact if I have questions about any of the above?

VOTER REGISTRATION

1. **ELIGIBILITY:** [Can I register to vote?](#)

To register to vote in California, a person must be:

- a United States citizen and a resident of California¹;
- 18 years old or older on Election Day (16 years or older can pre-register²);

¹ Cal. Elec. Code § 321, Cal. Elec. Code §2101

² Cal. Elec. Code § 2101

- not currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony³; and
- not currently found mentally incompetent by a court.⁴

2. **PRIMARY ELECTION:** [Can I vote in the primary election? Do I need to be registered with a political party? Can I change my party registration to vote in another party's primary election? When I voted, the poll worker asked my party affiliation. Are they allowed to do that?](#)

Presidential Primary/County Central Committee/Local Offices:

CA presidential primaries are either closed or modified-closed depending on political party affiliation.

A voter may change their party registration to vote in another party's primary election by re-registering with that specific party. This can be done *online* at <https://covr.sos.ca.gov/> up to 15 days before the election. If a voter needs to re-register to change party affiliation within 15 days of an election, the voter must register to vote *in person* at a polling place, vote center, or the voter's [County Elections Office](#). Note: with any registration change made during the 14 day pre-election period voters will have to vote provisionally.

Poll workers can ask whether a voter is registered with a political party *FOR THESE TYPES OF RACES ONLY*, and if so, which party in order to ensure that the voter receives the correct ballot.

More information about CA's primary system is [here](#).

U.S. Congressional/State Legislative/State Constitutional Offices:

All candidates, regardless of party, appear on one ballot (so there is NO NEED for a poll worker to ask a voter's party affiliation). A voter may vote for any candidate, regardless of their partisan registration status.

3. **STATUS:** [Am I registered to vote? What do I need to do if my name has changed since I registered? I am listed as inactive, what does that mean and what do I need to do?](#)

A voter can determine whether they are registered to vote by checking the California Secretary of State website [My Voter Status](#). Additionally, some, but not all, [County Elections Offices](#) have their own lookups. A voter can also phone their [County Elections Office](#) to confirm registration.

Name Change

Voters whose names have changed need to re-register. If doing so [online](#) the voter must check the box stating "I was previously registered or pre-registered to vote" and state the name under which they were previously registered.⁵ The Secretary of State recommends that voters update their identification *first* with the [DMV](#), which records are used for signature comparison. If the voter hasn't done so they should re-register with a paper application, or, if updating online should select "decline" when asked to use their

³ Cal. Elec Code §2101

⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 2208(a); [Voting Rights: Persons Subject to Conservatorship](#).

⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 2115; [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

DMV signature, and print, sign, and mail the application containing their new signature. Paper applications are available at the voter's [County Elections Office](#), public library, US Post Office, government offices, the DMV, or by calling (800) 345-VOTE(8683) or emailing the SOS's [Elections Division staff](#).

If only the *surname* of a voter has been changed they may also go to the polls and sign their name as it was before the change and also the appropriate name as it is at the time of voting, indicating on the roster on the same line by brackets or other means that the two names are the name of one person.⁶

Inactive

A voter is placed on inactive status if county elections officials have been notified (for instance by the USPS through undeliverable mail) that a voter has moved and the voter has failed to respond to a postcard requesting residency confirmation or address verification. Inactive status does *not* mean their voter registration is cancelled. If it is 14 or fewer days before election day and the voter hasn't re-registered with either their County Elections Office or the SOS; responded to the postcard; or sent a written notice to their County Elections Office, the voter should vote in person and confirm their residency at the polls. If they do not respond to the postcard, do not vote, or do not confirm their registration, an inactive voter is removed from the voter list and canceled after two federal general elections have passed since the postcard was sent.⁷

4. **HOW:** [How do I register to vote?](#) [Can I register online?](#) [Do I need a printer?](#) [Can I register to vote in person?](#)

Registration Options:

- **Online:** [California Online Voter Registration](#). (Language options are at the top of the webpage.)
- **Automatically:** when completing a driver's license, state ID, or change of address with the DMV.⁸
- Complete a *paper application* form available at [County Elections Offices](#), public libraries, DMV offices, U.S. post offices, or other government offices. The form must be mailed, returned in person to their county elections office, or can be placed in a dropbox if it is 29 to 15 days (by October 19, 2026 for November 3, 2026 General Election) before Election Day.
- **Phone, email, fax, or make an in-person request** for a registration application from the [County Elections Office](#). The application may be returned to their County Elections Office by mail or in person, or in a drop box if 29 to 15 days before Election Day (by October 19, 2026 for November 3, 2026 General)
- [Standard Form 76, "Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\)"](#) for military/overseas residents
- **Same Day (Conditional) Registration:** a person may conditionally register at their polling place or vote center on Election Day.
- **Exception to In-Person Conditional Registration Requirement:** Military/overseas voters and voters with disabilities (including unexpected hospitalization) can conditionally (same day) register via computer through their [County Elections Office's](#) "Remote Conditional Registration Form." Note that after using this option, voters needing a Remote Accessible Vote By Mail Ballot (RAVBM) need to obtain it from their County, which either has the ballot itself, the request form, or the phone number to request it on their website.
- Complete a [National Voter Registration Application](#).

⁶ Cal Elec. Code § 14218

⁷ Cal Elec. Code § 2226

⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 2265

- “Safe at Home” applicants for registration (also includes victims of child abduction and their families)⁹: should NOT use the regular online portal to register; for information on the program and registering to vote see [here](#). Voters enrolled in the program can email SafeAtHome@sos.ca.gov, or call toll-free: (877) 322-5227 to request a confidential voter registration form.

5. IDENTIFICATION: What ID is required to register to vote?

To **fully** register online voters will need:

- A California driver license or California identification card number,
- The last four digits of their social security number, and
- Their date of birth.

A person can begin the registration process [online](#) even if they do not possess a California driver license, California identification card, or social security number (with none of these, a unique identification number will be assigned to the registrant¹⁰). If they fill out all the other requested information, the website will create a pre-filled voter registration application for the registrant to print, sign and deliver to their [County Elections Office](#) by mail, in person, or by placing in the county elections ballot drop box if it is between 29 and 15 days before Election Day (by October 19, 2026 for November 3, 2026 General).

Elections officials will contact the voter with either notice of approval or if more information is needed to confirm eligibility.

NOTE: Voters who do not provide a driver’s license, ID, or Social Security number upon registering, or at some other time before voting, will be asked for ID when they vote for the first time. See [Question 19](#) for accepted forms of identification.

6. DEADLINES: When is/was the voter registration deadline? Are there different deadlines whether I register by mail, in-person, online or on Election Day?

Voter registration applications must be received by the voter’s [County Elections Office](#) no later than 15 days before Election Day (deadline is October 19, 2026 for November 3, 2026 General Election).¹¹

NOTE: This state has same day registration. See [Question 7](#) for more.

7. SAME DAY: Does my state have Same Day Registration? If so, what is the process?

Yes, same day registration is called Conditional Voter Registration. Californians can register to vote if they miss the 15-day deadline until 8 p.m. on Election Day. Eligible voters must go *IN PERSON* (see exception to in-person requirement below) to their county elections office, polling place, vote center, or any other satellite voting location established in their county to complete the Conditional Voter Registration form. (Location information here: [Early Voting](#), [Find Your Polling Place](#), or [County Elections Offices](#))

The voter may be able to vote nonprovisionally if the poll worker uses the statewide voter registration system to verify that the voter is eligible to register, has not voted in that election, and has not been

⁹ Cal Gov’t Code § 6205 .[Frequently Asked Questions :: California Secretary of State](#)

¹⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 2150(a)(7)(C)

¹¹ Cal. Elec. Code § 2119(d); [Election Dates and Resources: California Secretary of State](#).

included on a roster for that election in a non-VCA county. Otherwise, they will be offered a provisional ballot.¹²

Remote Conditional Registration (via computer): **Military/overseas voters and voters with a disability (including hospitalization)** can conditionally (same-day) register by using their [County Elections Office's](#) online Remote Conditional Registration link (or phoning or emailing a request). Voters who then need a Remote Accessible Vote By Mail ballot can either obtain one directly from their [County Elections Office](#) website or contact their County Elections Office to request a link to the RAVBM ballot.

8. PERMANENT MOVE: I have moved permanently and I didn't update my voter registration, can I vote?

If it is before the 15 day registration deadline (October 19, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 election), voters who have moved permanently can re-register online ([Register to Vote](#)), by paper voter registration application, or by sending a *signed and dated* letter to the voter's current [County Elections Office](#) with the voter's name, former address, current address, and a statement that the request is true and correct, under penalty of perjury.

If 14 days or fewer before Election Day, voters must use the conditional registration process to change their voter registration address at their polling place or vote center and vote provisionally. See [Question 7](#) above.

If the voter already updated their address with the Department of Motor Vehicles or U.S. Postal Service, their voter registration will have been automatically updated (unless they opted-out of a voter registration update during the DMV or USPS transaction).¹³

If a change of residence is within the county, the voter can submit a written change of address request at the polling place. If they're at their assigned precinct and their name is in the roster, and they have not been issued a mail ballot (or can surrender their mail ballot, or the elections official can verify they have not returned their ballot), they will be issued a regular ballot. OR if there is an electronic poll book (or other means to determine their precinct); and if the voter can be provided the ballot for their precinct; and the county has connectivity between locations; and it can be verified that the voter hasn't already cast a ballot, they will be issued a regular ballot.¹⁴

9. TEMPORARY MOVE: I have moved temporarily. How can I vote?

If the voter intends to return to their permanent residence in the future, the voter can continue to use their permanent residence as their registration address, and simply update the mailing address for their ballot to be received at their temporary location. (CA does not have absentee voting since it's a vote by mail state.)

- **Online** at [Register to Vote](#). Ideally, this should be done at least 30 days before Election Day. If later, between 29 and 7 days before any election, the voter can also request a *replacement* ballot be sent to their temporary address. See FAQ 46 for methods of obtaining a replacement ballot.

¹² Cal. Elec. Code § 2170(f); [Section 4 – Procedures for New Voters, Vote-by-Mail Voting, Provisional Voting, and Other Situations](#).

¹³ Cal Elec. Code § 2408(c)

¹⁴ Cal Elec. Code §§ 2119.5(b)(1), 2119.5(b)(2)

- Written requests to update a mailing address should be mailed or delivered in person *ideally* at least 30 days prior to Election Day in order for a new ballot to be sent to the voter's temporary residence. If between 29 and 7 days before any election, the voter can instead request a replacement ballot (see FAQ 46) with the temporary address; **however**, the 7 day window is a small one for the USPS to deliver a ballot, and the voter should have a "Plan B" (think [RABVM](#))
- If there is a risk the voter will not be able to receive and return a ballot (e.g. the 7 day window), they still have the option to receive a ballot by using the "Remote Accessible Vote by Mail Ballot" (RAVBM). They will need to obtain a RAVBM ballot on their [County Elections Office](#) website or to contact the office directly for assistance. The RAVBM requires use of a computer and printer. The voter can then place the ballot in any dropbox or deliver it to any polling place or County Elections Office in the state.¹⁵ If mailed it must be postmarked by Election Day. This [flyer](#) has voter-friendly RAVBM information.

Note: Since ballots are mailed out to all registered voters 29 days before Election Day, if a voter requests an address change within the 29-7 day window, it is possible that the voter will be issued two ballots: one going to their permanent address, the other to their temporary mailing address. The voter should not be concerned about this, as the county registrar will accept only one ballot -- whichever ballot is received first by their office.

10. **STUDENT:** [I am a college student. Can I register to vote where I go to school? What if I am taking classes remotely? Where can I vote?](#)

Californians living away from home while attending college may either register to vote at their campus address or their home address.¹⁶ A student may only register in one location during an election cycle. See also [Question 4](#) for registration options.

The registered student voter should check their registration status at the Secretary of State's [My Voter Status](#) webpage and make sure their mailing address is the one where they want to receive a ballot. If they want their ballot to come to their campus address, they can update their mailing address at [Register to Vote](#).

Students can also obtain a RAVBM ballot from their home [County's Elections Office](#) website, or by calling their Elections Office. The ballot must be completed online, printed and mailed, or returned to any polling place, drop box, vote center, or County Elections Office in the state, as long as it's postmarked by Election Day or submitted in person by 8 p.m. on Election Day. It will be forwarded if submitted in a different county from where the student is registered.¹⁷ Using the RAVBM option is the safest option if they want to vote the races on the original ballot sent to their home address and they want to maintain that address going forward. This [flyer](#) has voter-friendly RAVBM information.

If there's sufficient time, the student voter can also request that a replacement ballot be sent to their college address. See FAQ 46.

Otherwise, the student voter will need to go *in person* to their closest polling location/vote center. The CA SOS website will have polling locations listed here: [Early Voting](#) or here: [Find Your Polling Place](#).

¹⁵ Cal Elec Code § 3017

¹⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 2025;

¹⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017

The student voter will be given a provisional ballot, but portions of the PB may not be counted if school location and home address are in different counties (all statewide races/propositions will count, however).¹⁸ In that circumstance the student voter might want to relinquish their home address and conditionally (same day) register and vote with a provisional ballot at their current school location.

A student who attends school outside of California is considered a resident as long as California is still their domicile.¹⁹

11. LIVING ABROAD: I am living abroad and/or serving in the military. How can I register and/or vote?

WITH ANY VOTERS WHO ARE OVERSEAS/MILITARY VOTERS, IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT TO REMIND THEM TO READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS ON THEIR ELECTION MATERIALS EXTREMELY CAREFULLY!

Comprehensive information for CA overseas voters, including deadlines and County Elections Office contact information, can be found [here](#) (FVAP CA Info) and [here](#) (CA SOS Military and Overseas Voter Info).

Please note: The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and DoD fax service have discontinued their service of faxing military and overseas voters' election materials to county election officials. Voters can no longer send their voted ballot to FVAP and must fax directly to their County Elections Office.

Registration:

A CA resident qualifies as a military/overseas voter if they are absent from the county in which they are eligible to be registered if they are:

- A member of the active or reserve components of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard; a Merchant Marine; a member of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps; a member of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps of the United States; or a member on activated status of the National Guard or state militia, including their spouse and/or dependents; or
- a citizen of the United States living outside of the territorial limits of the United States or the District of Columbia.²⁰
- a member of the military called for military service within the United States seven or fewer days before Election Day.²¹

Military/Overseas CA residents must complete either the [online voter registration application](#) or the [Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\) \(PDF\)](#) in order to receive election materials and vote when absent from the country.²² They must provide election officials with an email address, and can request ongoing delivery of election materials and ballots to their overseas address.²³ In the online process, they can choose their preferred means of ballot delivery (mail/fax/email). The Federal Post Card Application

¹⁸ Cal. Elec. Code §14310(c)(3)

¹⁹ Cal. Elec. Code §§ 2021 and 2025

²⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 300

²¹ Cal. Elec. Code §3111

²² <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/military-overseas-voters>

²³ Cal. Elec. Code § 3120

should be mailed to the voter's [County Elections Office](#). Assistance is available through the [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#).²⁴

Registration deadline is 15 days before Election Day (October 19, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General). If the military/overseas voter misses this deadline, they can conditionally (same day) register via computer through their [County Elections Office's](#) "Remote Conditional Registration Form." (Some counties have this available on their website and others require that the voter contact them to obtain it). *Note that after using this option, voters needing a Remote Accessible Vote By Mail Ballot (RAVBM) need to also request the ballot from their County Elections Office, which either has the ballot, the request form, or phone number to request it listed on their website.*

If before the 15-day registration deadline voters can also use the Federal Write In Absentee Ballot to register and vote. See below.

Voting:

Ballots will be sent/transmitted to military/overseas voters (in the manner the voter requested in their application) no sooner than 60 days and no later than 45 days before Election Day.²⁵ If a military/overseas voter sends in their registration application after 45 days before Election Day, election officials will send/transmit the voter's ballot as soon as practicable.²⁶ **Completed ballots can be returned only by mail or fax:**

- If mailing: The voted ballot and signed return envelope must be postmarked by Election Day, and received by the voter's county elections office no later than 7 days after Election Day.
- If faxing: In addition to their completed ballot with a signed declaration on the return envelope, the military/overseas voter must also fax an "Oath of Voter" form to waive their right to a confidential vote. (This oath is *in addition* to the voter's declaration that is on the Military or Overseas Voter Return Envelope.) The voter should use the oath form provided by their county; however, many counties also accept the [Federal Voting Assistance Program \(FVAP\) Alternative Form \(PDF\)](#). The voter should check with their [County Elections Offices](#) before using FVAP's Alternative Form. The faxed ballot package (ballot, envelope, oath) must be received by their county elections office by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
- **NOTE:** The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and DoD fax service have discontinued their service of faxing military and overseas voters' election materials to county election officials. Voters can no longer send their voted ballot to FVAP and must fax directly to their County Elections Office.

Non-Receipt of Ballot:

If the voter sent their application materials at least 30 days before Election Day, and still have not received their ballot within 14 days of Election Day, they can contact their [County Elections Office](#) and explore their remedies (i.e. replacement ballot, Remote Accessible Vote By Mail ballot (RAVBM) (*must have internet access computer/tablet device, and a printer to use this option*) or Federal Write In Absentee Ballot.) See below:

²⁴ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/military-overseas-voters>.

²⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 3114

²⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 3114

RAVBM Some [County Elections Offices](#) provide direct access to the RAVBM and some require calling or emailing first. The RAVBM ballot is either sent via email or obtained online, completed online, printed, and then signed/dated. ***It must be returned by mail or fax.*** Mailed ballots must be postmarked by Election Day and received within seven days after the election. Faxed ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Note that if the voter intends to write in a candidate, they cannot use the RAVBM ballot. If the voter doesn't have the official return envelope there will either be instructions included with the ballot or the voter can use their own envelope, sign the outside of the envelope, and affix their own postage.

This [flyer](#) has voter-friendly RAVBM information.

Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot. A Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) is a blank write-in ballot. FWABs are available at consulates, embassies, from Military Voting Assistance Officers, and online [here](#). FWABs can be returned by mail or fax (voter must be overseas or activated within 6 days of Election Day to use one):

- **By Mail:** The completed FWAB must be signed and the "Voter Information" page dated. The voter folds along the dotted line and seals the completed "Official Backup Ballot." The voter **SHOULD NOT** write on the "Official Ballot" envelope. They need to insert the sealed "Official Ballot" envelope and the "Voter Information" page into the mailing envelope and mail directly to their [County Elections Office](#). Military voters can go to a military post office, embassy, or consulate and request a Prepaid Mail Label 11-DoD, which, when it arrives in the U.S., is treated as express mail and is trackable.²⁷ Embassies/Consulates will vary on dedicated hours and procedures for dropping off ballots for postage free return to the United States, so it's best to call or check their website first. Ballots must be postmarked by Election Day to be counted.
- **By FAX:** Once the FWAB is completed, the voter must sign and date the "Voter Information" page. Fax the signed "Voter Information" page, the "Official Backup Ballot" and the "Transmission Cover Sheet," found online at [FVAP.gov](#), directly to their [County Elections Offices](#). The voter must sign the secrecy waiver on the "Transmission Cover Sheet". Fax transmission must be received by 8 p.m. at the voter's county election office for the ballot to be counted.

Information on Mailing Addresses and FAX numbers for Military and Overseas Voters can be found at: [Mailing Addresses and Fax Numbers for Military or Overseas Voters](#)

12. **CRIMINAL CONVICTION:** I have a felony criminal conviction. Can I register to vote? Does the type of conviction matter? Are there any restrictions after any misdemeanor convictions? What process (if any) is needed to restore my right to vote if it was impacted?

CA residents with a misdemeanor conviction, or those with a criminal conviction in juvenile court do not lose their right to vote and should follow steps outlined in [FAQ #4](#) to register to vote. Online registration is [here](#).

CA residents with felony convictions currently serving a state or federal prison sentence, either in prison or in a local detention facility/county jail (in lieu of being housed in prison, NOT a "felony jail sentence"),

²⁷ [California FVAP Deadlines](#).

or who are currently in a county jail awaiting transfer to a state or federal prison cannot register to vote or vote (if they had been registered prior to imprisonment).²⁸ CA residents convicted of a felony and given a “Felony Jail Sentence” or any kind of community-based felony sentence such as probation or a “juvenile wardship adjudication” do not lose their right to register and vote.²⁹

CA residents with a history of criminal convictions can check their eligibility on the state on-line tool [Voting Rights Restored](#).

Restoring Voting Rights

When the resident is released from prison, their right to vote is automatically restored, even while on probation or parole, but they will need to re-register. Voters should follow steps outlined in [FAQ #4](#). See [Register to Vote](#) for online registration.

13. **INCARCERATED:** [I am currently incarcerated. Can I register to vote? Can I vote from jail?](#)

An individual *serving a state or federal prison term* for a felony in a federal or state prison, or a local detention facility county or local jail, is *not* allowed to register and vote.

All incarcerated individuals currently in jail serving a felony jail sentence, a misdemeanor sentence, or awaiting trial (but *not those serving a prison felony sentence and awaiting transfer to a state or federal prison*) are eligible to register to vote and cast a ballot from jail. See California SOS’s guidelines available at [Voting Rights: Persons with a Criminal History](#).

14. **REGISTRATION CHALLENGED:** [My registration has been challenged, what should I do?](#)

Grounds for a challenge include any or all of the following grounds:

- The voter is not the person whose name appears on the roster;
- The voter is not a resident of the precinct, or not a resident of the county (if voting at a vote center);
- The voter is not a U.S. citizen; or
- The voter has already voted in the election.³⁰

If at a polling place, only a member of a precinct board or other official responsible for the conduct of the election may challenge a voter’s eligibility to vote.³¹ Any other person is prohibited from challenging or questioning any voter concerning the voter’s qualifications to vote.

The voter can expect to be sworn to take an oath and answer questions by precinct board members. The voter *must* agree to take the oath and to swear/affirm their responses or they will not be permitted to vote. If the voter answers the questions unequivocally that assert their eligibility to vote, no additional questions can be asked.³² Any doubt in interpretation of the law must be resolved in favor of the voter.³³

²⁸ Cal. Const. art. II § 4; Cal. Penal Code 2910.5; Cal. Elec. Code § 2101(c)

²⁹ [Voting Rights Restored](#)

³⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14240(a)

³¹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14240(b)

³² Cal. Elec. Code § 14244

³³ Cal. Elec. Code § 14251

HOW TO VOTE: ELECTION DAY

15. HOURS: When do the polls open/close on Election Day?

Polls must be open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Election Day.³⁴
Anyone in line at 8:00 p.m. Pacific Time must be allowed to vote.

16. POLLING LOCATION: Where do I vote on Election Day?

All registered voters receive a mail ballot, but if they wish to vote in person, they can locate their polling location online at [Find Your Polling Place](#), phone their local elections office, check their [County Elections Offices](#) website, consult the election materials sent by their County Elections Office, or go to any vote center in their county if their county is a VCA county. A map and list of VCA Counties can be found here: [VCA Participating Counties](#). Voters who received a mail ballot should bring their ballot with them and surrender it, if possible.

17. TIME OFF WORK: Is my employer required to give me time off to vote? Is it paid or unpaid?

A public or private employer is required to give paid time off to vote ONLY for statewide elections. The employee is required to give at least two working days' notice that they will need time off to vote, if on the third day before Election Day the employee knows/has reason to know that time off will be necessary. No more than two hours of the time off for voting needs to be paid by the employer. In addition, the time off for voting shall be only at the beginning or end of the regular working shift, whichever allows the most free time for voting and the least time off from the regular working shift, unless otherwise mutually agreed upon.³⁵

18. CLOSING: What if the polls close when I am already in line?

A voter waiting in line at 8:00 p.m. must be allowed to vote.³⁶

19. IDENTIFICATION: What identification is required to vote?

A *fully registered* CA voter will not need to provide identification to vote as their identity has already been verified by county elections officials. Poll workers cannot ask for identification, unless it is marked on the polling location's voter's roster that "ID Required."³⁷ A poll worker may ask for ID in order to spell the voter's name or find them in the rolls, but fully registered voters are nevertheless not required to provide it.

³⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 14212

³⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 14000; 14002

³⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 14401

³⁷ [Section 2 – Ensuring and Protecting the Rights of Every Voter “Rights of Voters Who are Required to Provide Identification”](#).

First-time Voters: If a voter did not provide a driver's license number, a California identification number, or the last four digits of their social security number when registering to vote, they will need to provide proof of identity regardless of whether the voter plans to vote by mail or go in person to cast their ballot:

- *By Mail:* Before voting their ballot, the voter must send a photocopy of their identification (see list of acceptable ID below) to their [County Elections Office](#). Their ballot will remain unopened until the photocopy is provided.
- *In Person:* Before receiving a ballot at their polling location, the voter must show an acceptable form of identification, or else must vote provisionally.

Acceptable forms of identification include.³⁸

- Current and valid photo identification, **OR** a document that includes the voter's name and address, and that is dated after the last General Election, including:³⁹
 - Driver's license or identification card of any state;
 - Passport;
 - Employee identification card;
 - Identification card provided by a commercial establishment;
 - Credit or debit card;
 - Military identification card;
 - Student identification card;
 - Health club identification card;
 - Insurance plan identification card; or
 - Public housing identification card.
 - Utility bill;
 - Bank statement;
 - Government check or paycheck;
 - A document issued by a **government agency**:
 - sample ballot or other official elections document dated for the election in which the voter is providing as proof of residence of identity;
 - voter notification card;
 - public housing identification card;
 - lease or rental statement or agreement;
 - student identification card;
 - tuition statement or bill;
 - insurance plan card or drug discount card;
 - discharge certificates, pardons, or other official documents in connection with the resolution of a criminal case, indictment, sentence or other matter;
 - public transportation authority senior citizen and disabled discount cards

³⁸ Cal. Code Regs. tit. 2, § 20107(d)(1)

³⁹ Cal. Code Regs. tit. 2, §§ 20107(d)(1); 20107(d)(2)

- identification documents issued by governmental disability agencies;
- identification documents issued by government homeless shelters and other government temporary or transitional facilities;
- drug prescription issued by a government doctor or other governmental health care provider;
- property tax statement;
- vehicle reregistration; or
- vehicle certificate of ownership.

20. NO IDENTIFICATION: Can I vote without providing identification?

Yes, but see [Question 19](#) above.

21. NOT ON ROLLS AT MY POLLING PLACE: I am at my polling place but am not showing up on the voter registration roll. Can I vote where I am?

The registered voter should first confirm that they are at the correct polling location, unless they are residents of a VCA county (voters can vote at any vote center in [VCA Participating Counties](#).) If feasible, the voter should go to their correct polling place.

Ask the registered voter if they moved within their county (if non-VCA resident), and did not update their address with the DMV or their elections office. They will need to sign a written affirmation, stating that they are eligible to vote and are registered in the county where they desire to vote⁴⁰. They must at minimum be given a provisional ballot, but see [Question 8](#).

If the registered voter has NOT moved but is just at the wrong precinct (and cannot travel to their assigned precinct), they must be given a provisional ballot to vote.⁴¹ If the ballot cast by the voter at their current location contains candidates/measures on which the voter would not have been entitled to vote in their assigned precinct, only the votes for the candidates/measures on which the voter was entitled to vote in their assigned precinct will be counted.⁴²

If the registered voter has moved outside of their precinct or county and did not update their information before the 15 day deadline, they can re-register at their new location, see [Question 7](#) (Same Day Registration), and vote with a provisional ballot. (Some counties can verify eligibility on site, allowing voters to use a regular ballot.)

If the voter is no longer registered to vote due to a past determination of ineligibility, and subsequently becomes eligible to vote, the voter must re-register and must at minimum be allowed to use a provisional ballot. See [Question 7](#) (Same Day Registration),

⁴⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14310(a)

⁴¹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14310(c); [What To Do If Your Name Is Not on the Voter Roster](#).

⁴² Cal. Elec. Code § 14310(c)(3)(B)

If the voter is *unsure* whether they are in fact registered, and their name cannot be found in the register, they should fill out a conditional registration form and then vote with a provisional ballot. If the state finds two registrations it will cancel one of them.⁴³

22. GIVEN PROVISIONAL BALLOT: I am being told I have to vote provisionally, what does that mean?

It means that the election officials at the voter's polling location cannot verify the voter's eligibility to vote and/or whether they are actually registered to vote in the county where the voter desires to cast their ballot.⁴⁴ The voter should inquire as to the precise reason they are being offered a provisional ballot instead of a regular one, and do their best to provide any identification/documentation to resolve the issue. If not, they can vote a provisional ballot.

Common reasons why a voter may be told they must vote provisionally include:⁴⁵

- The voter moved but did not update their voter registration record to reflect the move;
- The voter's name does not appear on the list of registered voters and their eligibility to vote cannot be verified at the polling place;
- The voter's name (unless it is a changed surname) or address is different from that listed on the roster lists;
- The voter is a first-time voter who is unable or refuses to provide proof of identity.
- The voter cannot surrender their mail ballot, AND the polling location cannot verify whether the voter has already returned a ballot.
- The voter is voting during polling place hours that have been extended by a state or federal court.
- The voter is registered to vote, but is attempting to vote in a precinct different from the one in which the voter is registered (Non-VCA); or
- The voter is challenged and the challenge is not resolved in their favor.⁴⁶

23. REQUESTING PROVISIONAL BALLOT: I am being told I can't vote, can I vote provisionally?

YES. Any voter claiming to be properly registered is entitled by law to be given a provisional ballot under *any* circumstance.⁴⁷

24. PROVISIONAL BALLOT NEXT STEPS: I voted a provisional ballot, what now?

At the polling location, the voter must be given information by election officials regarding the provisional ballot process, and on how to check the status of their provisional ballot. The simplest way to check status is to use the [BallotTrax](#) website. Voters can also contact the voter's [local county elections office provisional ballot direct phone line](#). The voter has the right to know if their ballot was counted and, if not, the reason why it was not counted.

⁴³ Cal Elec. Code § 2172(a)

⁴⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 14310

⁴⁵ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/nvra/laws-standards/nvra-manual/chap-5>

⁴⁶ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/nvra/laws-standards/nvra-manual/chap-5>

⁴⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 2300(a)(2), § 14310

After Election Day, the voter's signature on the provisional ballot envelope will be examined and liberally construed in the favor of the voter.⁴⁸ If the voter did not sign the provisional ballot envelope, or if the elections official determined that the signature on the provisional ballot envelope does not compare to the signature(s) of the voter in the voter's record, the elections official must, on or before the next business day but no later than 8 days before certification of the election, inform the voter of the signature mismatch by first class mail with postage-paid return envelope. If the voter's email address or phone number is on file they will also be informed by email, call, or text message. The voter has until 5 p.m. 22 days after the election to cure their ballot.⁴⁹

HOW TO VOTE: IN-PERSON EARLY VOTING

(in this state defined as Early Voting)

25. AVAILABILITY: Is there early voting in my state (whether called early voting or in person absentee voting)?

Yes. In CA, this is known as Early Voting. The state does not use the term "*In Person Absentee*".

Early Voting can be done at:

[County Elections Offices](#) beginning 29 days before the election (October 5, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election). Voters can also register during this period.

[VCA County Vote Centers](#) Beginning 10 days before Election Day (October 24, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election) all [VCA](#) counties (Participating VCA Counties: Alameda, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Humboldt, Imperial, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Merced, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Ventura, Yolo) conduct early voting and conditional registration.

[Polling Places or Satellite Locations in Non-VCA counties](#) must also have at least one early voting location that is open for at least 6 hours on the Saturday before Election Day (October 31, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election).⁵⁰ For voters living in non VCA-counties, check with the [County Elections Office](#) to see if there are other dates and locations where early voting is offered.

26. ELIGIBILITY: Do I have to have a reason to vote early?

No.

27. WHEN: When does early voting begin/end?

⁴⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 3019(a)(2)(A)

⁴⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 3019 (d)(1)(A)

⁵⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 3016.3(b)

Beginning 29 days before Election Day (October 5, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election) voters can go to their [County Elections Office](#) to vote early (and register if necessary).

Beginning 10 days before Election Day (October 24, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election) All VCA counties (Participating VCA Counties: Alameda, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Humboldt, Imperial, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Merced, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Ventura, Yolo) conduct early voting and conditional registration.

Non-VCA counties must also have at least one early voting location that is open for at least 6 hours on the Saturday before Election Day (October 31, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election)⁵¹. For voters living in non VCA-counties, check with the [County Elections Office](#) to see if there are other dates and locations where early voting is offered.

28. WHERE: Where do I vote during early voting?

A list of locations offering early voting will be available at the SOS's [Early Voting](#) website. Follow the link, add the county, city, or zip code for early voting locations, days, and hours of operation. [County Elections Office](#) websites also have early voting information.

29. IDENTIFICATION: What identification is required for early voting? What if I don't have an ID?

Identification is not required to vote. See [Question 19](#) for exceptions.

30. ASSISTANCE: What if I need assistance voting early in person?

A voter must be allowed assistance from not more than two persons selected by the voter, other than the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of the union of which the voter is a member.⁵²

HOW TO VOTE: VOTE BY MAIL

(in this state defined as Vote By Mail:)

31. AUTOMATIC MAIL BALLOT: Will I automatically be sent a ballot in the mail?

Yes. All registered voters will be sent a ballot to the address listed on their voter registration beginning 29 days before Election Day. (October 5, 2026 for the November 3, 2026 General Election).

Registered voters with disabilities who require the use of assisted technology to fill out their ballot can request a Remote Accessible Vote by Mail Ballot (RAVBM) when they review their voter status at [My](#)

⁵¹ Cal. Elec. Code § 3016.3(b)

⁵² Cal. Elec. Code §14282(a)

[Voter Status](#), or by contacting their elections office [County Elections Offices](#). Some counties have direct links to the RAVBM ballot and others require that the voter request it. More information, including instructions, [here](#). See [here](#) (scroll down) for disability-friendly voter information guides such as audio, large print, and alternative format.

32. **ELIGIBILITY:** Do I need a specific reason to vote by mail?

N/A. All registered voters receive a mail-in ballot.

33. **APPLICATION DEADLINE:** What is the deadline for requesting a mail-in ballot?

N/A. All registered voters automatically receive a mail-in ballot.

34. **APPLICATION ASSISTANCE:** Can someone assist me with filling out the application?

N/A. All registered voters automatically receive a mail-in ballot.

35. **APPLICATION RETURN:** How do I submit my mail-in ballot application? Can someone return it for me? Does it have to be postmarked by a specific date?

N/A. All registered voters automatically receive a mail-in ballot.

36. **IDENTIFICATION:** Are there identification requirements when I return my mail-in ballot application and/or ballot?

N/A re: application.

Ballot return: *first time voters who did not provide identification when registering to vote need to include an acceptable form of ID **before their ballot can be opened**.* If they have not provided ID before returning their ballot they will be contacted by their County Elections Office and given the opportunity to provide it. Acceptable forms of ID are listed [here](#) and in [Question 19](#).⁵³

37. **RECEIVING MAIL BALLOT:** Does the ballot have to be sent to my home, or can I have it sent somewhere else? What if I don't have a home address or my address is a PO Box?

All registered voters will be sent a ballot to the address listed on their voter registration.⁵⁴ See [Question 9](#) for options and procedures for voters temporarily away from their residence.

⁵³ [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

⁵⁴ Cal. Elec. Code §2027

While voters must provide an address or, for unhoused voters, a description of the location where they physically reside to register to vote, a voter CAN use a PO Box or business address as a mailing address to receive their ballot.⁵⁵

38. MISSED THE APPLICATION DEADLINE: What if I have not requested a mail-in ballot by the deadline?

N/A. California automatically sends mail ballots to all registered voters..

39. STATUS OF APPLICATION AND/OR BALLOT: How can I check the status of my application and/or mail-in ballot?

Voters can sign up at [California BallotTrax](#) to receive automatic email, SMS (text), or voice call notifications about their ballot. Additionally, they can contact their [County Elections Office](#). Some county elections offices also have their own ballot trackers.

40. APPLICATION OR BALLOT REJECTED: I learned my mail-in ballot application and/or ballot was rejected. What can I do to fix any errors or get another one?

N/A re: application.

Ballots: Election officials must give notice to the voter, as soon as practicable, of a missing signature or signature mismatch by first class mail with a postage-paid return envelope. If a phone number and/or email address is on file the voter will also be notified by voicemail, email, or text message.⁵⁶

Included in the notice must be either a “signature verification statement” (in the case of a mismatch) or an “unsigned ballot statement” (if voter forgot to sign) for the voter to complete and return. These can be returned in person, by mail with a prepaid envelope provided by the county, by email, fax, or ballot drop box/open polling location (these last two are options only if the voter learned prior to Election Day that their ballot was rejected). The voter has until 5 p.m. 22 days after the election to cure their ballot.⁵⁷ The voter should continue to check the status of their ballot on [Ballotrax](#) after returning the notice to the county elections office.

41. COMPLETING BALLOT: How do I complete the mail-in ballot?

Follow the instructions on the ballot CAREFULLY. When the voter has finished marking their choices, they should insert the ballot into the envelope provided, making sure they have completed **all** required information. The voter should sign their name in a style consistent with how they signed their DL/State ID.

Completed ballots may be returned by:⁵⁸

⁵⁵ <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/statewide-elections/2025-special/trusted-info-homelessness.pdf>

⁵⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 3019(d)(1)(B); Cal. Elec. Code § 3019(j)(1)

⁵⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 3019 (d)(1)(A); Cal. Elec. Code § 3019(j)(1)

⁵⁸ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/vote-mail>.

- Mailing the ballot to the county elections official (USPS postage is pre-paid). Ballots must be postmarked by Election Day; OR
- Returning it in person in the sealed identification envelope to any polling place, vote center, or county elections office within the state no later than 8:00 p.m. on Election Day; OR
- Returning it in person without a sealed identification envelope to their assigned polling place or a vote center;⁵⁹ OR
- Drop Box: by dropping the sealed ballot into a designated ballot drop box anywhere within the state no later than at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day; OR
- Authorizing someone to return the ballot on behalf of the voter by 8 p.m. Election Day. Anyone may return a ballot, as long as they are not compensated based on the number of ballots that the person returns.⁶⁰ The voter must fill out the authorization section found on the outside of the ballot envelope and the person returning it must also sign it.⁶¹

42. ASSISTANCE COMPLETING BALLOT: *Can someone assist me in filling out my ballot?*

Yes. A voter may select not more than two persons, and they cannot be the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of the union of which the voter is a member.⁶² If a non-English-speaking voter needs assistance in their native language, they may also be able to get translated information from their [County Elections Office](#), including either ballots or facsimile ballots in their native language. Secretary of State links to information in additional languages [here](#).

43. DEADLINE TO RETURN BALLOT: *What is the deadline for the ballot to be received? Does it have to be postmarked by a specific date? Can I drop it off in person?*

Ballots that are dropped off (at any designated dropbox, voting location, or the county elections office in the state) must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Mailed ballots must be postmarked by Election Day, AND received no later than 7 days after Election Day to be counted.⁶³ Faxed military/overseas ballots must be received by 8 p.m. Election Day.

44. BALLOT DROP OFF LOCATIONS: *What are the locations for dropping off a ballot (instead of mailing it)?*

NOTE: California does not require voters to drop off their mail ballots in their home county; voters may use any voting site or dropbox in the state. Election officials will route ballots to the appropriate county for processing.

Information on drop boxes [here](#). Voters can also contact their [County Elections Office](#) or check its website.

Ballots can also be dropped off at satellite locations, polling locations, vote centers, or the [County Elections Office](#) (see county websites for locations). The Secretary of State also lists polling locations [here](#) (early voting) and [here](#).

⁵⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 3016.5(a)

⁶⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(e)(1)

⁶¹ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/vote-mail#vote-by-mail>

⁶² Cal. Elec. Code § 14282(a); <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-bill-rights>

⁶³ Cal. Elec. Code § 3020

45. ASSISTANCE DROPPING OFF BALLOT: *Can someone else drop off my completed ballot for me?*

Yes. The voter may select anyone to return their sealed ballot, so long as the person designated to return the ballot (and any entity they work for), does not receive any form of compensation based on the number of ballots returned.⁶⁴ The voter must fill out the authorization section found on the outside of the ballot envelope. The person designated by the voter to return their ballot must sign and return the ballot no later than 3 days after receiving it from the voter or 8 p.m. on Election Day, whichever period is shorter.

46. LOST OR SPOILED BALLOT: *What if I lost my mail-in ballot, made a mistake on it (spoiled it), or I received an incorrect ballot?*

The voter will need to request a replacement ballot. Only the registered voter may request a replacement ballot, but can designate a personal representative to pick it up instead of having it mailed (see below). A voter may request up to two additional ballots after losing/spoiling the first one.⁶⁵

The closer to Election Day it becomes, the less reliable the mail option will be for the voter to receive and return a ballot in a timely manner. See RAVBM below for an alternative to the replacement ballot.

- Written replacement ballot application requests (English pdf [here](#). Scroll down [this webpage](#) for replacement ballot requests in other languages) can be returned by mail, fax, email, ballot dropbox, or in person to their [County Elections Office](#). This is the best method.
- Phone: Up to 7 days before Election Day voters may be able to call their [County Elections Office](#) and request a replacement ballot, but this may vary by county.
- Online: An online option (other than RAVBM method, see below) to request replacement ballots is only available at the county level, and only in select counties. See the [County Elections Office](#) website to see if it is available.
- A personal representative can pick up their replacement ballot. The voter is required to fill out this form, [Application to Provide Vote-By-Mail Ballot to Representative](#). Their representative will need to bring this permission form *IN PERSON* to the voter's [County Elections Office](#).
- Remote Accessible Vote by Mail Ballot (RAVBM). Although they can be used any time, if it is within 7 days of Election Day, RAVBM may be the best option. Voters may need to contact their [County Elections Office](#) for assistance. (Some counties make the RAVBM ballot available on their websites and some require the voter to request it.) RAVBM voting requires use of a computer or tablet and a printer to print the completed ballot. Ballots can be dropped off or mailed, but cannot be returned electronically. (Exception: overseas/military voters can return by fax.) This [flyer](#) contains voter-friendly RAVBM information.
- Voting in Person option for lost ballot: If the voter cannot obtain a replacement ballot in time, or prefers to vote in person, they can also go to their [County Elections Office](#), polling location, or

⁶⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(e)(1)

⁶⁵ Cal. Elec. Code §14288

vote center, and vote in person, but will need to use a provisional ballot if officials are unable to verify at the polling location that the voter hasn't already voted.⁶⁶

- **Voting in Person for spoiled ballot:** If the voter cannot obtain a replacement ballot in time to return it, or prefers to vote in person, and did not destroy their ballot, they should bring the spoiled ballot with them and surrender it, and will be able vote using a regular ballot. If they did destroy the ballot, and cannot surrender it, and officials are unable to verify that they haven't voted, they will need to vote with a provisional ballot.

47. NON-RECEIPT OF BALLOT: What if I requested a mail-in ballot but have not received it? What are my options for voting?

Voters should first check [California BallotTrax](#) to view the date when their ballot was actually mailed, and whether the elapsed time since the date of mailing is concerning, as well as the proximity to Election Day. Then, follow [FAQ #46](#) above.

48. IN PERSON OPTION: What if I requested or received a mail-in ballot but I want to vote in person on Election Day?

Any voter can choose to vote in-person rather than by mail. Voters have the following options:

- They can bring their completed, signed, and sealed mail ballot to any polling location or county elections office within the state.⁶⁷
- They can bring their ballot, with or without the envelope, to their assigned polling place or vote center, and mark it there. The ballot will be counted if the polling location has the electronic ability to check that the voter has not already voted, can change the voter's status to "in person," and the voter provides their name, address, and signature.⁶⁸
- They can go to their assigned polling location (If living in VCA county, any vote center within the voter's county of residence) and surrender their ballot to elections officials in exchange for a polling place ballot.⁶⁹
- If they are unable to surrender their mail ballot, but elections officials are able to verify that the voter's ballot has not already been returned and notates the voter's records to ensure that the voter's mail ballot is not cast or tabulated after the voter casts their ballot at the polls, they may vote a regular ballot⁷⁰; or
- Vote in person by provisional ballot if none of the above apply.⁷¹

HOW TO VOTE: ABSENTEE

(in this state defined as: Vote by Mail)

⁶⁶ Cal. Elec. Code §3015

⁶⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(a)(1)(B)

⁶⁸ Cal. Elec. Code §§ 3016.3, 3016.5

⁶⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 3015(a)(1)

⁷⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 3015(a)(2)

⁷¹ Cal. Elec. Code §§ 3015, 3016.

49. ELIGIBILITY: Am I eligible to request an absentee ballot?

N/A All active registered voters automatically receive mail ballots.

50. APPLICATION DEADLINE: What is the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot?

N/A. California is a vote by mail state.

51. IDENTIFICATION: Are there any identification requirements?

N/A. All registered California voters automatically receive mail ballots.

52. EMERGENCY: Is there an emergency absentee ballot? If so, am I eligible?

Within 6 days of Election Day (deadline to request a mailed replacement ballot has passed), there are three options to get a ballot delivered under emergency circumstances:

- *IF THE VOTER HAS ACCESS TO INTERNET, COMPUTER OR TABLET, AND PRINTER*, the easiest option would be for the registered voter to complete a RAVBM ballot, and have an authorized person either mail, deliver to a ballot dropbox, or deliver in person to county elections office/polling location/vote center. Voters can get access to a RAVBM ballot by contacting their [County Elections Office](#) (the voter should first check their county website, as they may be able to access the RAVBM ballot directly). The RAVBM ballot is completed online, printed, and then signed/dated. It *CANNOT BE RETURNED ELECTRONICALLY* (Exception: military/overseas voters can fax their ballots). This [flyer](#) contains voter-friendly RAVBM information.

Note: Voters with disabilities (including unexpected hospitalization) or overseas/military voters *who have not already registered* can also conditionally (same-day) register by using the online request through their county's "Remote Conditional Registration Form." Once elections officials verify eligibility information, the voter is registered and then can request or obtain a RAVBM ballot.

- A registered voter may request in any written statement signed under penalty of perjury that a ballot be delivered to their authorized representative. The signature on the application must match the voter's signature on their registration record, and the authorized representative must sign an acknowledgement of receipt of the voter's ballot.⁷² ([Application to Provide Vote-By-Mail Ballot to Representative](#); [County Elections Offices](#) to get the county-specific pre-printed form). This form must be dropped off in person, but if that is impossible, contact the voter's [County Elections Office](#). A "designated person" can be anyone, including a hospital volunteer, who may return a ballot on behalf of a voter,⁷³ as long as they do not get compensated or receive consideration based on the number of ballots returned.⁷⁴

⁷² Cal. Elec. Code § 3014(b)

⁷³ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(a)(2)

⁷⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(e)(1)

- If either option above is not feasible, contact the voter's [County Elections Office](#) *directly* and let an elections official know the specific circumstances of the voter's situation. They may be able to help develop a voting plan. This CA SOS [flyer](#) for voters with medical emergencies notes that some County Elections Offices have teams that can visit healthcare facilities, or hospital volunteers who can assist with obtaining a ballot.

53. APPLICATION RETURN: Where and how can I return my absentee ballot application? Can someone return it for me?

N/A, since all registered voters will receive a mail ballot. If the voter needs a replacement ballot see [Question 46](#).

54. STATUS OF APPLICATION AND/OR BALLOT: How can I check the status of my absentee ballot application and/or absentee ballot return?

N/A re: ballot application.

Voters can track their ballot at [BallotTrax](#) and check the following:

- When the ballot was mailed;
- When the voter's completed ballot has been received by the county; and
- Whether the voter's completed ballot has been accepted or a reason why the ballot could not be accepted and instructions of steps the voter can take in order to have the ballot accepted.

55. APPLICATION OR BALLOT REJECTED: I learned my absentee ballot application and/or ballot was rejected. How can I confirm this and what can I do to fix any errors or get another one?

N/A re: application. California doesn't have absentee ballots. A regular ballot can be sent to a temporary address. See [Question 9](#).

The voter should first check the information on [BallotTrax](#) (see [Question 54](#) above).

If a ballot was flagged for a signature mismatch or missing signature, election officials will give notice to the voter no later than the 22nd day after Election Day of a missing signature/signature mismatch by first class mail with postage-paid return envelope, and, if the information is on record, by voicemail, text message, or email.⁷⁵ Included in the notice must be either a "signature verification statement" (in the case of a mismatch) or an "unsigned ballot statement" (if voter forgot to sign) for the voter to complete and return.

These can be returned in person, by mail with a prepaid envelope provided by the county, by email, fax, or ballot drop box/open polling location (these last two are only options if the voter learned prior to Election Day that their ballot was rejected). The voter has until 5 p.m. 22 days after the election to cure their ballot.⁷⁶ The voter should continue to check the status of their ballot acceptance after returning the notice to the county elections office.

56. COMPLETING BALLOT: How do I complete the absentee ballot?

⁷⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 3019(d)(1)(B)

⁷⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 3019 (d)(1)(A)

N/A re: absentee ballot. For all ballots:

Follow the instructions on the ballot CAREFULLY. When the voter has finished marking their choices, they should insert the ballot in the envelope provided, making sure they have completed **all** required information on the envelope. The voter should sign their name in a consistent manner with how they signed their DL/State ID.

Completed ballots may be returned by:⁷⁷

- Mailing the ballot (USPS postage is pre-paid) to the voter's county elections office [County Elections Offices](#) postmarked by Election Day; OR
- Returning it in person to any voting site or county elections office within the state no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day; OR
- Dropping the ballot into a designated ballot drop box within the state no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day; OR
- Authorizing someone to return the ballot on behalf of the voter by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Anyone may return a ballot on behalf of a voter, as long as they are not compensated to do so based on the number of returned ballots.⁷⁸ The voter must fill out the authorization section found on the outside of the ballot envelope and the person returning it must sign it.⁷⁹

57. ASSISTANCE COMPLETING BALLOT: *Can someone assist me filling out the ballot?*

Yes. A voter may select not more than two persons, and they cannot be the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of the union of which the voter is a member⁸⁰ If a voter needs language assistance, they may be able to get information or a ballot in their native language. The CA SOS has materials in nine additional languages. See [here](#). Depending on population, [County Elections](#) websites may have materials in more than the ten languages listed on the SOS website.

58. BALLOT DEADLINES: *What is the deadline for the ballot to be postmarked and/or received by, including dropping it off in person?*

A completed ballot must be dropped off in person at any drop-box, voting location, or county elections office within the state by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Mailed ballots must be postmarked by Election Day and received no later than 7 days after Election Day to be counted.⁸¹

59. BALLOT DROP OFF LOCATIONS: *Where can I drop off a ballot (instead of mailing it)?*

A list of dropbox locations will be available [here](#) as well as in the voter's official election materials and on their [County Elections Office](#) website. Ballots can also be dropped off at any polling place, vote center, satellite voting location, or County Elections Office in the state.

60. ASSISTANCE DROPPING OFF: *Can someone else drop off my completed ballot for me?*

⁷⁷ Vote by Mail

⁷⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(e)(1)

⁷⁹ Vote by Mail

⁸⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14282(a);

⁸¹ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-bill-rights>
<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/frequently-asked-questions>

Yes. The voter may select anyone to return their sealed ballot, so long as the person designated to return the ballot (and any entity they work for), does not receive any form of compensation based on the number of ballots returned.⁸² The voter must fill out the authorization section found on the outside of the ballot envelope and the person returning it must sign it. The person designated by the voter to return their ballot must return the ballot no later than 3 days after receiving it from the voter or by 8 p.m. Election Day, whichever period is shorter.

61. LOST OR SPOILED: What if I lost my absentee ballot or it is spoiled or I received an incorrect one?

See [Question 46](#)

62. NON-RECEIPT OF BALLOT: What if I requested an absentee ballot but have not received it? Can I do anything?

N/A re: absentee ballots. For all ballots voters should first check [California BallotTrax](#) to view the date when their ballot was actually mailed, and whether the elapsed time since the date of mailing is concerning, as well as the proximity to Election Day. Then, follow [Question 46](#) above.

63. IN PERSON OPTION: What if I requested an absentee ballot but I want to vote in person on Election Day?

Any voter can choose to vote in-person rather than by mail.⁸³ Voters have the following options but each one is COUNTY-DEPENDENT (ask voter if they live in a VCA or non-VCA county):

- They can bring their completed, signed, and sealed ballot to any polling location or county elections office within the state.⁸⁴ (Polling location is accepting the ballot as if it was going to be placed in a drop box);
- They can vote their mail ballot in person by bringing their mail ballot to their assigned polling place or vote center, with or without the envelope, which will be counted only if the polling location has electronic ability to confirm that the voter has not already voted in the current election. Polling officials can then change the voter's status to "in person," after the voter provides their name, address, and signature.⁸⁵
- They can go to their *assigned polling location* (If living in a VCA county, can be any voting center within the voter's county of residence) and bring their ballot to surrender to elections officials, in exchange for a polling place ballot.⁸⁶
- If they are unable to surrender their mail ballot, but election officials are able to verify that the voter's ballot has not already been returned and notates the voter's record to ensure that the voter's mail ballot is not cast or tabulated after they vote at the polls, then they may vote a regular ballot.
- Vote in person by provisional ballot if none of the above apply.⁸⁷

64. IN PERSON ABSENTEE: Where do I vote in-person absentee? When can I do this?

⁸² Cal. Elec. Code § 3017(e)(1)

⁸³ Cal. Elec. Code § 3018. Also see [Voting at a Polling Place after Applying to Vote by Mail](#).

⁸⁴ [Voting at a Polling Place After Applying to Vote by Mail](#).

⁸⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 3016.5; § 14216

⁸⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 3015

⁸⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 3015, 3016

In-Person Absentee is considered Voting in Person. See [Early Voting FAQ Section](#) or [Question 48](#).

POLLING PLACE ISSUES

65. **POLLING PLACE NOT OPEN:** The polling place is not open. What should I do?

First, confirm that the voter is at the correct polling location by going to their county elections website [County Elections Offices](#). (Counties may have more current information as to polling locations than the SOS website). If the website information indicates they are at the correct location, then determine from the voter what election races they were anticipating voting for, as sometimes the polling location is not open because there is no actual election (very common with municipal and county races) being held at the voter's registered address. If you learn that the voter IS at the correct polling location, AND there IS an election in their precinct occurring, AND the polling location is closed, **THEN** advise the voter to *stay in line and NOT LEAVE*.

66. **LONG LINES:** There are long lines at the polling place. What should I do? What if the polls are closing while I'm in line?

MOST IMPORTANTLY, TELL THE VOTER TO **NOT LEAVE!** Get the polling location address! Ask the voter if they have been provided with ANY EXPLANATION as to WHY the lines are so long (i.e equipment failure, running out of ballots and waiting for more to be delivered, etc.).

Any voter (including a voter dropping off a vote-by-mail ballot) waiting in line at 8:00 p.m **MUST** be allowed to vote.⁸⁸ **THEY MUST NOT LEAVE THE LINE, OR THEY WILL FORFEIT THIS RIGHT.**

67. **EQUIPMENT FAILURE:** What should I do if there are equipment problems at my precinct?

Voters should immediately notify the election officers if voting equipment breaks down while the polls are open. **VOTERS SHOULD NOT LEAVE WITHOUT CASTING SOME FORM OF BALLOT.** All voting locations must have state-approved alternative procedures in place in case of equipment problems or running out of ballots.⁸⁹ All polling locations will have a polling place supervisor that the voter can speak with, if they still have questions after speaking with the poll workers and need additional assurance that they will be able to cast a ballot.

Ballot Shortage: If the polling location runs out of ballots, elections officials **MUST** deliver additional ballots to ensure that voters may cast a ballot within two hours.⁹⁰ Election officials **MUST OFFER** any voter who CANNOT WAIT one of the following state-approved alternative means to cast their ballot:⁹¹

- Provisional ballots-under these circumstances, the provisional ballot **WILL BE COUNTED** as a regular ballot⁹²

⁸⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 14401. See also [Section 3 Polling Place Hours](#).

⁸⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14299

⁹⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14299(a)

⁹¹ ["Ballot Shortages," Section 4 - Procedures for New Voters, Vote-by-Mail Voting, Provisional Voting, and Other Situations.](#)

⁹² Cal. Elec. Code § 14300(e)

- Vote-by-mail ballots
- Sample ballots
- Facsimile ballots
- Ballots from neighboring precincts
- Ballot marking devices
- Emergency or test ballots that many counties include in precinct supply kits (provided the ballots contain the names of all candidates and titles of all ballot measures along with corresponding areas for voters to mark their choices)

Broken Accessible Voting System Equipment: If an accessible voting system is not available or is broken, the voter should inform elections officials immediately and the voter should ask the elections officials to please call the Disability Rights California’s voting hotline at 1-888-569-7955.⁹³ (DRC works with county election offices *directly* to resolve equipment issues on behalf of voters with disabilities. DRC also assists voters with filing equipment related complaints after elections.)

Depending on the voter’s needs, election officials may be able to deliver another accessible voting system or find an alternative means for the voter to cast a ballot (i.e assisting with completing a paper ballot.). This situation can be extremely frustrating and disempowering for voters with disabilities, and the voter should contact the DRC to file a complaint even if it is after the election. In the future the voter could explore the option of utilizing a RAVBM from their residence in the future if they don’t already know about it.

68. **CAMPAIGNING:** What rules apply to people campaigning or “hanging around” my polling place? What counts as campaigning or electioneering? Can people approach me?

Any visible display or audible dissemination of information that advocates for/against any candidate or measure on the ballot ***is prohibited within 100 feet*** of a voting center/polling place (*or a building entrance that houses that polling place/voting center*), curbside voting location, a dropbox, or a county elections office/its satellite location.⁹⁴

Clearly identified members of the news media/Exit opinion poll researchers may speak to voters leaving the polling place as long as they do not interrupt voting and are at least 25 feet from the polling place entrance.⁹⁵

A voter can be approached ***outside of the 100 ft.*** boundary, but the voter’s access to polling location entry cannot be blocked. The voter should immediately inform elections officials at the polling location if this is happening, as well as any other prohibited conduct (see [Question 69](#)), as elections officials are responsible for maintaining the electioneering zone around the polling location. If the voter fears for their physical safety, advise them to immediately call 9-1-1.

69. **VOTER CONDUCT:** What am I prohibited from wearing or doing in a polling place? Can I take photos inside?

Prohibited materials and information and actions include, but are not limited to:

⁹³ <https://www.disabilityrightscalifornia.org/publications/voters-with-disabilities>

⁹⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 319.5; Cal. Elec. Code § 18370

⁹⁵ [“Rights of News Media and Opinion Pollsters.” Section 2 – Ensuring and Protecting the Rights of Every Voter.](#)

- A display of a candidate's name, likeness, or logo;
- A display of a ballot measure's number, title, subject, or logo;
- Buttons, hats, pencils, pens, shirts, signs, or stickers containing information about candidates or issues on the ballot information about candidates or issues on the ballot;
- Any audible broadcasting of information about candidates or measures on the ballot; and
- Obstructing access to, loitering near, or disseminating visual or audible electioneering information within 100 ft of a ballot drop box;
- Interfering with a voter's right to cast their ballot/Interfering with election officials performing their official duties;⁹⁶
- Displaying a weapon/firearm, unless the voter is a peace officer who is at the polling place to cast their ballot, a uniformed security officer hired by the county or city, or a private guard hired permanently by the property owner of the polling location, not just for Election Day;⁹⁷
- Harassing or threatening behavior, including aggressive questioning of voters based on a person's race, gender identity, or aggressively questioning voters about their citizenship, criminal record, or other qualifications to vote;
- Challenging voters' right to vote.

A voter may enter the polling location with clothing or a face covering that contains just the slogan of a particular candidate. This is not considered electioneering.⁹⁸

Voters may take photographs of their own ballot within the privacy of their voting booth, but they must NOT show the photo to other voters at the polling location or take photos of other people voting,⁹⁹ and they should not photograph or record a voter entering or exiting a polling place.¹⁰⁰

70. POLL WORKER CONDUCT: What is a poll worker prohibited from wearing or doing in a polling place?

Poll workers may not engage in electioneering; see Question [68](#) and [69](#) or, for intimidation, see [Question 71](#). See also https://eplegal.wpengine.com/#voter_intimidation. They cannot discriminate or act with insensitivity in matters regarding a voter's race, ethnicity, language, literacy, gender/LGBTQ+, age, disability, or party preference.¹⁰¹ They cannot take any actions that threaten the voting process or infringe on the rights of voters.¹⁰² They cannot wear campaign-related attire while on duty in the polling place.¹⁰³

71. INTIMIDATION: Are there any other specific restrictions on conduct outside of a polling place? What should I do if I feel unsafe or uncomfortable outside the polling place?

⁹⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 18502

⁹⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 18544

⁹⁸ ["Electioneering," Section 4 – Procedures for New Voters, Vote-by-Mail Voting, Provisional Voting, and Other Situations.](#)

⁹⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14291; §§ 2300(a)(4), 18540; California Constitution, art. II, § 7

¹⁰⁰ ["What Activities are Prohibited," Notices Regarding Prohibition of Electioneering and Corruption of the Voting Process.](#)

¹⁰¹ [Section 2 – Ensuring and Protecting the Rights of Every Voter.](#)

¹⁰² [Section 2 – Ensuring and Protecting the Rights of Every Voter .](#)

¹⁰³ Cal. Gov. Code § 18370; ["Notices Regarding Prohibition of Electioneering and Corruption of the Voting Process," Notices Regarding Prohibition of Electioneering and Corruption of the Voting Process.](#)

- If the voter fears for their personal or another's physical safety, advise them to immediately call 9-1-1.
- If it is not an emergency situation, collect all details as to what is occurring. Voter intimidation in CA is a felony offense¹⁰⁴, so it is critical to get all possible documentation. See https://eplegal.wpengine.com/#voter_intimidation.
- Have the voter inform election officials IMMEDIATELY, and document what they told the voter the actions that they would take to remedy the intimidation.
- Examples of prohibited acts of voter intimidation that may occur *within or outside of the polling location* can include:¹⁰⁵
 - Blocking access to and from the voting locations (including the parking lot)¹⁰⁶
 - Threatening criminal action against voters
 - Presenting false information about voter eligibility requirements, including criminal consequences for voting (e.g., credit card debt, arrest warrant checks, etc.)
 - Harassing or threatening behavior, including aggressive questioning of voters based on a person's race/ethnicity, gender identity, or aggressively questioning voters about their citizenship, criminal record, or other qualifications to vote
 - Challenging voters' right to vote
 - Presenting false information to voters about the voting process and requirements, including the ability to speak English, or the need to present certain types of photo identification
 - Assault, battery, threats of violence, brandishing a weapon/firearm
 - Arrests within 200 ft of a polling place for anything other than a crime against person or property or disruption of a polling place.
 - Violations of this law can allow for extension of polling place hours if voting is disrupted. Votes cast during extended hours will be via provisional ballot.

72. **CHALLENGE:** Someone is formally challenging my vote. What should I do?

Grounds for a challenge include any or all of the following grounds:

- The voter is not the person whose name appears on the roster;
- The voter is not a resident of the precinct, or not a resident of the county (if voting at a vote center);
- The voter is not a U.S. citizen; or
- The voter has already voted in the election.¹⁰⁷

Only a member of a precinct board or other official responsible for the conduct of the election may challenge a voter's eligibility to vote at a polling location.¹⁰⁸ Any other person is prohibited from challenging or questioning any voter concerning the voter's qualifications to vote.

¹⁰⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 18540

¹⁰⁵ [General Election: Voter Intimidation; Prohibited Voter Challenges](#).

¹⁰⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 18541

¹⁰⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 14240

¹⁰⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 14240

If the precinct board receives any *document or list* challenging the voter's eligibility, the board member must first determine whether the evidence constitutes probable cause to justify or substantiate a challenge. Then the board member must notify the elections official charged with the duty of conducting the election, and describe the evidence bearing on the voter's qualifications to vote. The elections official shall advise the members of the precinct board as to whether probable cause exists for instituting and substantiating the challenge.¹⁰⁹

A challenged voter at a polling location must take an oath and answer questions directly asked by precinct board members. The voter must agree to take the oath and to swear/affirm their responses or they will not be permitted to vote. If the voter answers the questions unequivocally, and asserts their eligibility to vote, no additional questions can be asked.¹¹⁰ Any doubt in interpretation of the law must be resolved in favor of the voter.¹¹¹

In the event that the precinct board determines that persistent challenging of voters is resulting in a delay of voting sufficient to cause voters to forego voting due to insufficient time or fear of unwarranted intimidation, the board shall discontinue all voter challenges.¹¹²

73. **POLICE/MILITARY PRESENCE:** There are police/members of the military at the polling place. Is this okay? What should I do?

In California, no person in possession of a firearm, no uniformed law enforcement officer, private guard or security personnel, and *no person wearing the uniform* of a law enforcement officer, guard or security personnel may be stationed in the immediate vicinity of, or posted at, a polling place without written authorization of the appropriate city or county elections official.¹¹³ However, the following exceptions apply:

- An unarmed uniformed guard or security personnel who is at the polling place to cast their ballot
- A law enforcement officer who is conducting official business in the course their public employment, or who is at the polling place to cast their ballot
- A private guard or security personnel hired or arranged for by city or county elections officials
- A private guard or security personnel hired or arranged for by the owner or manager of the facility where the polling place is located, if the guard or security personnel is not hired or arranged solely for Election Day.

Law enforcement officers (state, federal, and local) may not make arrests within 200 feet of a polling place on Election Day for offenses other than crimes against person or property or for disrupting operation of a polling place. Violations of this law can allow for extension of polling place hours if voting is disrupted. Votes cast during extended hours will be via provisional ballot.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14240(c)

¹¹⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14244

¹¹¹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14251

¹¹² Cal. Elec. Code § 14253.

¹¹³ Cal. Elec. Code §§ 18544, 18545.

¹¹⁴ Cal. Elec. Code [§§ 403](#)

In addition, California prohibits the use or threat of any force, violence, or tactic of coercion or intimidation to induce or compel someone to vote or refrain from voting.¹¹⁵

74. **THOUGHT WAS REGISTERED:** My name isn't on the voter registration roll but I thought I was registered. What should I do?

The registered voter should first confirm that they are at the correct polling location, unless they are residents of a VCA county (can vote at any vote center [VCA Participating Counties](#)). If feasible, the voter should go to their correct polling place. If their registration cannot be confirmed, then the voter should request and cast a provisional ballot.

Ask the registered voter if they moved within their county (if non-VCA resident), and did not update their address with their elections office. They will need to sign a written affirmation, stating that they are eligible to vote and are registered in the county where they desire to vote.¹¹⁶ See [Question 8](#) for standards of issuing a *nonprovisional* ballot. If those standards aren't met, they must be given a provisional ballot.

If the registered voter has NOT moved but is just at the wrong precinct (and cannot travel to their assigned precinct), they must be given a provisional ballot to vote.¹¹⁷ If the ballot contains candidates/measures on which the voter would not have been entitled to vote in their assigned precinct, only the votes for the candidates/measures on which the voter was entitled to vote in their assigned precinct will be counted.¹¹⁸

If the registered voter has moved outside of their precinct or county and did not update their information before the 15 day deadline, they can re-register at their new location,(see [Question 7](#) Same Day Registration), and vote with a provisional ballot. Their vote will be counted after county elections officials verify their voter information. (Some counties can verify on site, allowing voters to use a regular ballot.)¹¹⁹

If the voter *IS NO LONGER REGISTERED TO VOTE* due to a past determination of ineligibility, who subsequently becomes eligible to vote, the voter must re-register. See [Question 4](#) (how to), [Question 6](#) (deadlines), [Question 7](#) (same day), *AND THEY MUST BE ALLOWED TO VOTE A PROVISIONAL BALLOT*.

If the voter is *unsure* whether they are in fact registered, and their name cannot be found in the register, they should fill out a conditional registration form and vote with a provisional ballot. If the state finds two registrations it will cancel one of them.

75. **PROVISIONAL BALLOT:** I have been offered a provisional ballot. What should I do?

The voter should inquire as to the precise reason, as it means that the election officials at the voter's polling location cannot verify the voter's eligibility to vote. The voter should try to confirm they are at the correct polling place, and are actually registered to vote in the county where the voter desires to cast

¹¹⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 18540 *et seq.*

¹¹⁶ Cal. Elec. Code § 14310(a)

¹¹⁷ Cal. Elec. Code §§ 14217, 14310(c); [What To Do If Your Name Is Not on the Voter Roster](#).

¹¹⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 14310(c)(3)(B)

¹¹⁹ Cal Elec Code §§ 14310-14311, 15350, 2170

their ballot.¹²⁰ The voter should do their best to provide any identification/documentation to resolve the issue; and if not, they can vote a provisional ballot.

Common reasons why a voter may be told they must vote provisionally include:¹²¹

- The voter moved but did not update their voter registration record to reflect the move;
- The voter is not voting in their assigned precinct;
- The voter list shows a different political party from the one the voter claims to be registered with;
- The voter's name does not appear on the list of registered voters and the eligibility to vote cannot be verified at the polling place;
- The voter's name (unless it is a changed surname) or address is different from that listed on the roster lists;
- The voter is required to provide identification under HAVA and is unable or refuses to provide proof of identity. Under HAVA, first-time voters who registered by mail – and for whom neither the social security number nor state identification number could be verified – may be required to provide proof of identity;
- The voter requested a vote-by-mail ballot, but cannot surrender their vote-by-mail ballot, AND your location cannot verify if the voter has already returned their voted vote-by-mail ballot, and cannot notate the voter's voter record accordingly;
- The voter is voting during polling place hours that have been extended by a state or federal court;
- The voter is challenged and the challenge is not resolved in their favor.

ACCESSIBILITY/ASSISTANCE

76. EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE: I don't know how to use the voting equipment. Can I get help?

Yes. Elections officials must instruct voters on usage of the machines before they enter the booth and are required to answer any related questions.¹²² If the voter enters the booth and still needs assistance working the equipment, elections officials must provide any information that will assist the voter to operate the machines.¹²³

77. PHYSICAL DISABILITY: I have a physical disability and need assistance. Is my polling place ADA compliant? Does my voting location have an accessible voting system?

All voting centers and polling places must be accessible for all elections. Generally voting locations in California go above and beyond the ADA requirements; in some rare instances a polling place might be inaccessible but the elections office should have notified the voter. Vote centers and polling locations must provide both a handheld magnifying glass and signature guide card, to assist persons while signing their names on the roster.¹²⁴ Each vote center must have at least three voting machines that are

¹²⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14310

¹²¹ [Chapter 5: Provisional Voting](#).

¹²² Cal. Elec. Code § 14272.

¹²³ Cal. Elec. Code § 14272

¹²⁴ Cal. Elec. Code § 14105(o), (p)

accessible to voters with disabilities.¹²⁵ Each polling place must have at least one voting machine that is accessible to voters with disabilities.¹²⁶ For specific details on assistive technology available in the voter's county, check: [How to Use Your County's Voting System](#)

Curbside voting is available statewide. A voter with a disability must be allowed to vote by regular ballot outside any vote center or polling place, REGARDLESS of the polling place's accessibility.¹²⁷

Disabled voters who have computer access and access to a printer might also consider voting from home using the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) ballot, which allows voters with disabilities to utilize their own personalized adaptive technologies. This can be done 29 days before, and through Election Day. The voter can request or obtain a RAVBM ballot either online or by contacting their [County Elections Office](#) or through the SOS's [My Voter Status](#). They can complete their ballot online, print and sign it, and return their voted ballot in person at a polling location, vote center, dropbox, or their County Elections Office, designate someone to return it by filling out the information on the ballot envelope, or by mail via USPS (must be postmarked by 8 p.m. Election Day). It cannot be faxed or emailed.

If the voter with a disability needs to same-day/conditionally register they may also do this from home through their [County Elections Office](#). They must *first* register and then request or obtain the RAVBM ballot from their County Elections Office.

For voters who have specific questions related to accommodations for disabled voters voting-by-mail or voting in person— refer them to the Disability Rights California Hotline at 1-888-569-7955 or visit [CA Disability Rights Organization](#) for more information.

78. READING/LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE: I am blind, have a physical disability, or cannot read English and require assistance in order to vote. Can I get assistance at the polls?

Yes. Any voter who, for any reason, requires or wants assistance, may receive assistance from up to two persons selected by the voter¹²⁸, other than the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of the union of which the voter is a member.

In addition, American Sign Language, large print, and audio versions of the Official Voter Information Guide are available at the [California Secretary of State's website](#) or by calling 1-800-345-VOTE (8683) (voice or TDD/TTY).

79. LANGUAGE ACCESS: I am not an English speaker. What language resources are available? Can I bring someone in the booth to help me understand the ballot?

A voter can designate on their voter registration one of nine languages other than English in which to receive election materials. See [here](#) or top of page [here](#) to designate non-English materials. Voters can also make this request through their [County Elections Office](#). Some counties, depending on the percentage of any particular non-English speaking population, may provide materials in more languages than the nine listed on the SOS website. List is [here](#).

¹²⁵ Cal. Elec. Code § 4005(a)(2)(B)

¹²⁶ Cal. Elec Code § 12280

¹²⁷ Cal. Elec. Code § 14282 (d)(3)

¹²⁸ Cal. Elec. Code § 14282(a)

Polling places or Vote Centers are also required to provide either translated *facsimile* ballots or translated *ballots*, depending on the size of the county's population needing translated materials.¹²⁹

Any voter who requests assistance at a polling place or vote center has the right to receive assistance from a pollworker who can help translate or no more than two persons selected by the voter, other than the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of the union of which the voter is a member.

80. CURBSIDE VOTING: Is curbside voting available? How do I request it?

All polling locations must offer curbside voting and the voter should contact their [County Elections Office](#) to confirm procedures for contacting the elections officials at their polling location. Polling locations should have a sign posted outside with directions for how to contact the elections official to come outside for the curbside voting. A precinct board member will then check-in the voter, take a regular ballot to the voter, and return the completed ballot to the polling place.

81. VOTER GUIDE: Can I bring a voting guide or reference notes with me into the voting booth?

Yes, a voter may reference notes (including those on electronic devices) and/or bring a voting guide/sample ballot into the voting booth, however none of these notes/sample ballot choices should be visible to other voters.¹³⁰ In addition, extra local voter guides are typically available at most polling places.

STATE SPECIFIC SUPPLEMENT

82. VOTING WHILE UNHOUSED: I am currently unhoused, how do I vote?

A voter may register to vote as long as they have a location where they can be properly assigned to a voting precinct. A voter can register to vote at an address where they spend most of their time, such as a shelter, or can describe where they live so it is clear enough for their county officials to find their voting precinct; cross streets and parks may be used. Voters *can* designate P.O. Boxes or a business address as their *mailing* address to receive their election materials. Unhoused voters can find more information [here](#).

83. QUESTIONS: Who should I contact if I have questions about any of the above?

The Secretary of State's office maintains the following toll-free voter hotlines:

- (800) 345-VOTE (8683) – English
- (800) 232-VOTA (8682) - español / Spanish
- (800) 339-2857 - 中文 / Chinese

¹²⁹ Cal. Elec. Code § 14201(g)(1) & (2), Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. Sec. 10101 et seq.)

¹³⁰ Cal. Elec. Code § 14291; Cal. Elec. Code § 2302; Cal. Code Regs. tit. 2 §20107(2)(F); Cal. Elec. Code § 319.5; Cal. Elec. Code § 18370

- (888) 345-2692 - हिन्दी / Hindi
- (800) 339-2865 - 日本語 / Japanese
- (888) 345-4917 - ខ្មែរ / Khmer
- (866) 575-1558 - 한국어 / Korean
- (800) 339-2957 - Tagalog
- (855) 345-3933 - ภาษาไทย / Thai
- (800) 339-8163 - Việt ngữ / Vietnamese
- 711 – TTY/TDD

In addition, contact information for each county elections office is listed [here](#).

CA Voter Guide is available [here](#).