



# **Election Officials Manual**

## **Chapter 6: Michigan's Absent Voter Process**

July 2024

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# I. Introduction

Michigan's state constitution and the Michigan Election Law allow any voter to request and vote an absent voter ballot. This chapter covers the absent voter (AV) ballot process, including applications, deadlines, procedures for issuing absent voter ballots, emergency absent voter ballots, and receipt of absent voter ballots. Questions about the content of this chapter should be directed to Elections@Michigan.gov.

# II. Eligibility

Every person registered to vote in Michigan is entitled to request, receive, and vote an absent voter ballot for an upcoming election. A request from a voter is not required for the Secretary of State or any county or municipal clerks to provide an absent voter application to a voter in person, electronically, or by mail with prepaid return postage.

# III. Absent voter ballot application process

A voter must request their absent voter ballot in writing from their city or township clerk. An emailed request for an absent voter ballot is considered to be a written request, so long as the mandatory elements explained in the following paragraph are present. A clerk cannot issue an absent voter ballot in response to an oral request made over the phone or in person. However, upon receiving an oral request, a clerk may issue that voter an *Absent Voter Ballot Application*. The city or township clerk is required to issue an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* to any registered voter who requests one.

A written request for an absent voter ballot is sufficient and must be honored by the clerk so long as the request includes the voter's name and a visible signature. This application may be submitted in person or via mail, fax, email, or online at [Michigan.gov/Vote](https://Michigan.gov/Vote). A physical written application may be scanned or otherwise digitized and emailed to the voter's local clerk, so long as the voter's signature is visible. To ease the absent voter ballot application process for voters and clerks wishing to use a paper application, the Bureau of Elections provides a fillable *Absent Voter Ballot Application*



form, available online.<sup>1</sup> Local clerks are also permitted to design their own *Absent Voter Ballot Application* form, so long as the form requests the voter's name and signature and follows all other requirements laid out in this chapter. If it is sent by mail, the application must be sent with a postage prepaid return envelope. For information on using the state-funded prepaid postage permit, refer to the *Prepaid Postage Guide and FAQ*.<sup>2</sup>

## **Absent voter ballot must be sent immediately**

City and township clerks must immediately process absent voter applications. As noted in this document, to facilitate immediate delivery, the clerk should send the ballot immediately after reviewing the AV ballot application, which must be done by the end of the next business day following receipt of the application in most cases. If the signature on the application agrees sufficiently with the signature on file, and it is within the 40-day period before the election listed in the application, the clerk must immediately send or deliver the ballot to the applicant. If it is sent by mail, the ballot must be sent with a postage prepaid absent voter ballot return envelope. For information on using the state-funded prepaid postage permit, refer to the *Prepaid Postage Guide and FAQ*.<sup>3</sup>

Voters may submit an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* before blank absent voter ballots are printed and delivered to the clerk. If a voter has submitted an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* to the clerk and the clerk has verified the signature on that absent voter application, the clerk must send the voter an absent voter ballot immediately upon delivery of blank absent voter ballots to the clerk.

## **Opportunity to cure a deficiency and notice**

If the application is found to be deficient, the voter must be notified of the insufficiency and their options to cure that deficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.michigan.gov/sos/-/media/Project/Websites/sos/Elections/Election-Forms/Absent-Voter-Ballot-Application-Fillable.pdf?rev=c35e859a2abe40dfbca3c95027c8072a&hash=4430F4C6B6C603D59A7E196EB7E5B05A>.

<sup>2</sup> Available on eLearning at <https://mielections.csod.com/ui/lms-learning-details/app/material/f48cc379-22c8-44d1-b6b6-c169aaf51f00>.

<sup>3</sup> Available on eLearning at <https://mielections.csod.com/ui/lms-learning-details/app/material/f48cc379-22c8-44d1-b6b6-c169aaf51f00>.



Between 45 and 6 days before an election, the clerk must make a reasonable effort to verify or reject any received *AV ballot application* by the end of the **next business day** following receipt. If the clerk determines that the voter's signature on the application is deficient, the clerk must notify the voter by telephone, email, or text message, if available, or by U.S. mail if the other methods are unavailable.

Beginning five days before an election and on Election Day, the clerk must verify or reject the received *AV ballot application* by the end of the **calendar day** of receipt. If the clerk determines that the elector's signature on the application is missing or does not agree sufficiently with the signature on file, the clerk must notify the elector by phone, email, or text message, if available, or by U.S. mail if the other methods are unavailable.

After 4 p.m. on the Friday before the election, if the clerk determines that the voter's signature on an *AV ballot application* is missing or does not agree sufficiently with the signature on file after this time, the clerk must **immediately** notify that voter of the rejection of their application.

## Online absent voter ballot application

Voters can also request an absent voter ballot online at Michigan.gov/Vote. Voters who have a Michigan state driver's license or state ID Applications and apply through Michigan.gov/Vote use the signature that the voter submitted when applying for their driver's license or state identification card.<sup>4</sup> A digital signature is an acceptable signature for the *Absent Voter Ballot Application*. Registered voters without a Michigan driver's license or state ID can apply for an AV ballot at Michigan.gov/Vote by taking a picture of their signature and uploading it with their online application.

## Requirements for in-person absent voter ballot applications

If a voter applies to receive an absent voter ballot in person at their city or township clerk's office, the voter is required to present a picture ID or sign the *Affidavit of Voter not in Possession of Picture Identification* form. Both the acceptable picture IDs and the affidavit are the same as those required for in-person voter registration and in-person voting on Election Day. For more information, refer to *Chapter 2: Voter Registration in Michigan*. A copy



of the *Affidavit of Voter not in Possession of Picture Identification* is also included in *Appendix I*.

A voter who does not have an acceptable picture ID and who signs the *Affidavit of Voter not in Possession of Picture Identification* **must** be issued a ballot.

A voter who applies for an absent voter ballot in person at their local clerk's office before 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election may choose to either receive the absent ballot at the clerk's office at the time the application is submitted or to have the clerk mail the absent voter ballot to the voter's address. A voter who applies for an absent voter ballot in person at their local clerk's office after 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election must receive the ballot at the clerk's office after submitting the application; the voter cannot opt for the ballot to be mailed to the voter's address. If a voter applying for an absent voter ballot does not have a valid picture ID and signs the *Affidavit of Voter not in Possession of Picture Identification*, and if the voter receives their absent voter ballot at the clerk's office, the voter's absent voter ballot must be processed as a challenged ballot. For more information on how to process a challenged ballot, refer to the section *Preparing a Challenged Absent Voter Ballot*.

Voters who submit an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* through the mail, fax, or email, who submit the application through a municipal drop box, or who submit their application using any method that does not include an in-person interaction with their local clerk or the clerk's staff, are not required to show a picture ID to be issued their absent voter ballot.

## **Multiple-election (or "dual") absent voter ballot applications**

Voters submitting an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* to receive an absent voter ballot for a primary election or presidential primary may opt for that application to also serve as the voter's application to receive an absent voter ballot for multiple elections – specifically, all elections following that primary or presidential primary in the calendar year. While the application has been referred to as a "dual" application in the past, when it typically applied to a primary and its corresponding general election, the application now functions as a multiple-election application. For example, a voter can submit a single *Absent Voter Ballot Application* for both the August primary election and the November general election. A voter could also submit a single *Absent Voter Ballot Application* for a presidential primary election and every election that



follows it, which may include a May regular election, August primary election, and November general election. The multiple-election or “dual” application could also include any special elections that follow the primary or presidential primary.

A voter may also choose to submit their *Absent Voter Ballot Application* for only the primary election. A voter may choose not to have their *Absent Voter Ballot Application* treated as a multiple-election or dual application for any reason, including because the voter wishes to vote in person in certain elections. The number of voters who submit multiple-election applications will likely decline in future years as more voters join the permanent mail ballot list.

Any *Absent Voter Ballot Application* form developed by a local clerk must allow voters to select from the options described.

## **Accessible absent voter ballot applications**

Voters with print disabilities can apply for an accessible electronic absent voter ballot using the Democracy Live OmniBallot format, which is available at [Michigan.Gov/Vote](https://Michigan.Gov/Vote).

Print disabilities are disabilities that interfere with the effective reading, writing, or use of printed material. This definition includes persons who are blind or visually impaired, those with learning disabilities, as well as those with a physical disability that interferes with holding or manipulating paper or a pen and pencil.

Accessible applications must include the voter’s Michigan driver’s license number, state ID number, or the last four digits of the voter’s Social Security number along with other voter registration information. Accessible applications do not need to be signed. When voters complete the *application for an accessible ballot*, the Bureau of Elections verifies the information provided matches the voter’s QVF information and the application is added to the voter’s QVF record. The Bureau of Elections then generates the voter’s ballot in the OmniBallot platform. Finally, the Bureau emails the clerk two links: one for the clerk to verify the OmniBallot ballot is accurate, and one for the voter to access the ballot. The Bureau also includes in this email instructions on how to use the OmniBallot system.

When a clerk receives the email, the clerk should first open the designated clerk link and verify that the ballot is accurate. Next, the clerk should email the designated voter link and instructions on how to use the OmniBallot





system to the voter. The instructions supplied in the email from the Bureau to the clerk should appear in the body of the email sent to the voter. Finally, the clerk should mark in QVF that the voter has been sent an accessible ballot and record the letter "A" followed by the ballot number (for example A0001).

The voter then completes the ballot on the OmniBallot platform, prints it, and returns the completed ballot to the clerk in a signed envelope.

## **Absent ballot applications received from military and overseas voters**

If a voter applies for an absent voter ballot using a *Federal Postcard Application* (FPCA) or submits a Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), the voter should be processed as a military and overseas (MOVE) voter. If a voter applies for an absent voter ballot using a regular application and lists a foreign address as the mailing address or temporary address, the voter should also be processed as a MOVE voter. If the voter provides an address in the United States that appears to be a military address, the clerk should contact the voter to determine if the voter is a MOVE voter. For instructions on receiving absent voter ballot applications and issuing absent voter ballots to military and overseas voters, refer to *Chapter 7: Military and Overseas Voters*.

## **IV. Maintaining a permanent mail ballot list**

When applying for an absent voter ballot, a voter may also request to receive an absent voter ballot by mail for all future elections. Once this application is verified, the voter becomes a permanent mail ballot voter and must be sent an absent voter ballot for every election. The local clerk must retain these applications for six years after the first election for which that voter receives a ballot. The clerk must also record the permanent ballot status in the voter's record in QVF. This status will follow voters if they move to a different jurisdiction. In the future, these applications or a report verifying that a voter on the permanent mail ballot list has moved will be able to be added to the voter's record in QVF to more easily document a voter's move to different jurisdictions.



The Secretary of State or appropriate clerk removes a voter from the permanent mail ballot list only in the following circumstances:

- The voter submits a signed request to remove their name from the permanent mail ballot list.
- The voter is no longer qualified to vote in Michigan.
- The Secretary of State or appropriate clerk receives reliable information that the voter has moved residences to another state or has moved to another residence within the state without updating the voter's registration address.
- The voter does not vote for six consecutive years. If an application is rescinded for this reason, the clerk must send a notice to the voter that the application has been rescinded.

QVF is programmed so that if a voter registration is cancelled or placed on an inactive status because of reliable information showing a move or voting inactivity, the voter is automatically removed from the permanent ballot list. Therefore, clerks do not need to manually remove voters from the ballot list after updating their registration status in QVF. Manual removal from the permanent ballot list is necessary only if the voter submits a signed request to remove their name from the permanent mail ballot list.

Following the first full election cycle with the permanent mail ballot list (after November 2024), the Bureau of Elections plans to discontinue QVF functionality for the permanent absent voter ballot *application* list. When this occurs, the Bureau will provide instructions regarding the discontinuation of the list; until that time, clerks should continue to issue absent voter ballot applications for all elections to those on the list.

## **Presidential primary ballot selection form**

For presidential primary elections, the two major political parties have separate ballots with their party's prospective candidates, and each voter may select only one party's ballot to vote. To indicate which partisan primary they intend to vote in, a permanent mail ballot voter must submit a *presidential primary ballot selection form* to their clerk online, by mail, or in person.

Clerks will send presidential primary ballot selection forms with prepaid return postage to all permanent mail ballot voters who have not made a



ballot selection no later than 60 days before the presidential primary. If a voter becomes a permanent mail ballot voter after this deadline, the clerk must immediately send a ballot selection form with prepaid return postage.

Clerks must send ballot selection forms to the same addresses that voters requested for mailing absent voter ballots.

Clerks must notify permanent mail ballot voters who have not made a ballot selection by the 40th day before the presidential primary of the requirement to make a selection in order to receive a presidential primary ballot. The notification must be by phone, email, and text message if available. If the voter's phone number and email address are unavailable, clerks must send notice by mail, and may additionally notify the voter by other available methods.

If the presidential primary has offices or proposals on the ballot other than President of the United States, a separate ballot with only those other offices or proposals will be mailed to the voter. The mailing must also include a notice indicating that the voter did not make a presidential primary ballot selection and describing the process by which the voter can still participate in the presidential primary election, including early voting or voting in-person on Election Day.

## **V. Deadlines for requesting an absent voter ballot**

There are several deadlines affecting the submission of absent voter ballot applications. The municipal clerk, or authorized personnel appointed by the clerk, must be available in the election official's office or at another publicly published or posted location to accept and process absent voter ballot applications at the deadlines laid out in this section.

### **Deadline to request an absent voter ballot be mailed to a voter**

If a voter wishes to have their absent voter ballot mailed to their address, the *Absent Voter Ballot Application* must be received by the clerk no later than 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election.



While a voter has the legal right to request that their absent voter ballot be mailed to their address so long as the clerk receives the voter's *Absent Voter Ballot Application* by 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election, the Bureau recommends that clerks encourage voters submitting near the deadline to request their absent voter ballot be issued in person at the clerk's office to avoid mail delays or other issues.

If a voter's *Absent Voter Ballot Application* is received by the clerk after 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election and indicates that the voter wishes the absent voter ballot to be mailed to the voter's address, the clerk should alert the voter that their absent ballot request cannot be fulfilled. The clerk should inform the voter that the voter may appear in person at the clerk's office to request their absent voter ballot or may vote in person at their early voting site, if early voting is available for that election, or at their polling place on Election Day. An *Absent Voter Ballot Application* rejected as untimely for one election must still be processed for any future elections listed on the application.

## **Deadline to request an absent voter ballot be issued to the voter at the clerk's office**

Absent voter ballots can be issued to a registered voter at the clerk's office at any time until 4 p.m. on the day prior to the election. A voter may then complete and submit the absent voter ballot at the clerk's office, return the absent voter ballot to the clerk or an absent voter ballot drop box until 8 p.m. on Election Day, or tabulate the absent voter ballot at the voter's polling place on Election Day.

Every voter waiting in line at their clerk's office to request an absent voter ballot at 4 p.m. on the day prior to the election must be issued an absent voter ballot and allowed to complete the ballot in the clerk's office.

## **Same-day voter registration**

A voter who registers to vote or who updates their registration on Election Day by appearing in person at their clerk's office is also eligible to request and receive an absent voter ballot until 8 p.m. on Election Day. If the voter requests an absent voter ballot in person at the clerk's office on Election Day after registering to vote or updating their voter registration, the voter must complete the absent voter ballot in the clerk's office and return the completed ballot to the clerk prior to leaving the clerk's office.



Every person waiting in line to register to vote or to update their voter registration at 8 p.m. on Election Day, and who meets the requirements to register to vote, must be given the opportunity to request an absent voter ballot and allowed to complete the ballot in the clerk's office, including after 11:59 p.m. on Election Day if necessary.

## **Emergency absent voter ballots**

A voter may make an emergency request for an absent voter ballot if the voter cannot vote in person on Election Day because the person has become physically disabled or because of a family death or illness, the timing of which made it impossible for the voter to apply for an absent voter ballot by the statutory deadline.

A voter facing an emergency prior to 5 p.m. on the Friday before Election Day may submit a regular *Absent Voter Ballot Application*. An emergency absent voter ballot request must be made after 5 p.m. on the Friday before the election and before 4 p.m. on Election Day.

To receive an emergency absent voter ballot, the voter must complete a written request that includes the following elements:

- The voter's name and address.
- A statement that the voter is qualified to vote in the election.
- A statement indicating whether the emergency is caused by a physical disability or by a family death or illness requiring the voter to be absent from the jurisdiction on Election Day.
- A statement that the emergency occurred at a time that made it impossible for the voter to submit an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* by the statutory deadline.

Clerks may, but are not required to, provide an *Emergency Absent Voter Application* form that a voter may use in lieu of creating the written statement.

The voter requesting the emergency absent voter ballot may authorize another person to receive the voter's absent voter ballot, and to deliver that absent voter ballot to the voter. The authorization to receive an emergency absent voter's ballot and to deliver that ballot to the voter must be in writing and must be signed by the applicant. An emergency absent voter ballot may also be delivered by hand to the applicant by a person authorized by the clerk to handle this task.



## **VI. Required office hours on the weekend before the election**

The clerk or a deputy clerk of each city or township must be available at the clerk's office to issue and receive absent voter ballots applications and absent voter ballots for any combination of at least 8 hours on the Saturday or Sunday immediately before Election Day. The clerk is required to publicly post the hours at which the clerk will be available to issue and receive absent voter ballots applications and absent voter ballots. The clerk must also enter these hours into *QVF Clerk Contacts* at least 30 days prior to Election Day.

## **VII. Restrictions on possession of signed absent voter ballot applications**

Only the following persons may lawfully possess a signed *Absent Voter Ballot Application*:

- The voter requesting an absent voter ballot.
- A member of the applicant's immediate family.
- A person residing in the applicant's household.
- A person handling of mail during the course of their employment.
- A person registered to vote in Michigan who was asked to submit the *Absent Voter Ballot Application* by the applicant.
- An authorized election official.

A person registered to vote in Michigan who returns an *Absent Voter Ballot Application* at the request of the applicant must sign the *Certificate of Authorized Registered Elector Returning Absent Voter Ballot Application*. If the application the person is returning is made on the *Absent Voter Ballot Application* form provided by the Bureau of Elections, the certificate appears on the back of that form. Otherwise, the person should submit a completed, signed, and dated version of the following text:



*I certify that my name is ..... , and my address is .....; that I am delivering the Absent Voter Ballot Application of ..... at the applicant's request; that I did not solicit or request to return the application; that I have not made any markings on the application; that I have not altered the application in any way; that I have not influenced the applicant; and that I am aware that a false statement in this certificate is a violation of Michigan election law.*

## **VIII. Absent voter ballot application signature verification requirement**

When a clerk receives a completed *Absent Voter Ballot Application*, the clerk must check that the signature appearing on the application matches the signature on the applicant's voter registration record to verify the applicant's identity. If the application contains a digital image of the voter's signature, which may occur because the voter has faxed or scanned and emailed an application or because the voter has applied online using the voter's driver's license signature, the clerk should compare the digital signature image to the voter's signature on file. A signature is invalid only if it differs in significant and obvious respects from the voter's signature on file. Slight dissimilarities must be resolved in favor of the voter, and an exact signature match is not necessary to determine that a signature agrees sufficiently with the signature on file.

If the clerk determines that a signature on an application does not match the individual's voter registration record, or if the application is not signed, the clerk should notify the voter of the issue and of the voter's options to cure the issue as described in the *Opportunity to cure a deficiency and notice* section of this chapter. For further guidance on reviewing signatures, contacting voters, and curing missing or mismatched signatures, refer to *Signature and Cure Guidance*<sup>5</sup> in the eLearning Center.

An *Absent Voter Ballot Application* with Power of Attorney (POA) signature in lieu of the voter's signature cannot be accepted. Michigan election law allows a voter unable to sign due to physical disability to make a "mark" or to use a signature stamp.

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<sup>5</sup> Available in the eLearning Center at <https://mielections.csod.com/ui/lms-learning-details/app/material/ae9edc3b-8bfd-4494-a5c1-eb7022679d7a>.



## IX. Issuance of absent voter ballots

An *Absent Voter Ballot Application* must be processed immediately upon receipt of the application by the clerk. Absent voter ballot applications that were not submitted in person at the clerk’s office should be processed in the order they are received. An absent voter ballot should be immediately issued to a voter who submits their *Absent Voter Ballot Application* in person at the clerk’s office.

A voter can request that an absent voter ballot be mailed to the voter’s registration address or to a different address as provided on the *Absent Voter Ballot Application*. Additionally, an absent voter ballot may be mailed or delivered to a post office box if the post office box is where the voter normally receives mail and the voter does not receive mail at their registration address.

Absent voter ballots cannot be sent by forwardable mail. Absent voter ballot envelopes should be printed with the postal instruction “Return Service Requested.”

Campaign brochures or any material other than the absent voter ballot and instructions explaining how to complete and return the absent voter ballot may not be mailed with absent voter ballots. Additionally, the name of an elected or appointed official cannot appear on any ballot-related materials. Ballot-related material is defined as anything distributed with an absent voter ballot, including the instructions, the secrecy sleeve, the envelope in which the absent voter ballot is mailed, and the absent voter ballot return envelope.

An absent voter ballot must be mailed to the voter if there is an adequate amount of time for the voter to receive the ballot by mail, vote the ballot, and return the ballot to the clerk prior to 8 p.m. on Election Day. To avoid any appearance of impropriety, absent voter ballots should not be delivered by hand when the voter has requested the ballot be mailed unless the hand delivery of the ballot is necessary to ensure the timely return of the ballot.

## X. Anatomy of an absent voter ballot

Each absent voter ballot mailing includes the following elements placed inside the outer mailing envelope. The clerk should check that each of the elements is present in every envelope before the envelope is mailed to the voter. Examples of each element may be found in *Appendix I*:





- Ballot instructions appropriate for the election being held.
- Instructions for absent voters (usually printed on the secrecy sleeve).
- Secrecy sleeve (if required to cover ballot markings).
- Correct ballot (be mindful of ballot splits within a precinct caused by different geography such as school districts, villages, county commission districts, etc.).
- Ballot return envelope addressed to the local clerk's office, including the voter signature certification.

## **XI. Absent voters who receive assistance**

If an absent voter receives assistance from another person when marking their absent voter ballot, the individual who provided assistance must sign the certificate printed on the outside of the ballot return envelope. The certificate must be signed by any person who assists an absent voter in marking their ballot, including the voter's spouse, a member of the voter's household, an election official, or an individual employed as an election assistant.

## **XII. Return of absent voter ballots**

Absent voter ballots must be returned to the clerk by 8 p.m. on Election Day. The clerk must make arrangements with the post office to pick up any absent voter ballots which are received by the post office after the post office on Election Day has made its final mail delivery of the day to the clerk's office. The clerk and the post office should also coordinate to ensure that the post office conducts a final check of its premises for any absent ballots delivered to the post office prior to 8 p.m., to ensure those ballots are delivered to the clerk.

The 8 p.m. deadline applies to absent voter ballots returned to a clerk's office, a satellite clerk's office, or a ballot drop box. Voters in line to register to vote at 8 p.m. on Election Day must be allowed receive, complete, and return an absent voter ballot after registering to vote, including after 11:59 p.m. if necessary.



## **Individuals allowed to return an absent voter ballot**

Only certain persons are legally allowed to return a completed absent voter ballot. Persons who may return a completed absent voter ballot are limited to:

- The voter
- A member of the voter's immediate family
- A person residing in the voter's household whom the voter has asked to return the voter's completed absent voter ballot
- A person handling of mail during the course of their employment
- An authorized election official

## **Tabulation of an absent voter ballot at an early voting site or Election Day polling place**

A voter may also bring their own completed absent voter ballot to their early voting site or Election Day polling place to place into a tabulator to be counted. The absent voter ballot should be concealed inside its secrecy sleeve and the voter should indicate to the election inspectors that they would like to tabulate their ballot. For more information about processing these voters, refer to *Chapter 11: Early Voting* and *Chapter 12: Election Day and the Voting Process*.

## **XIII. Ballot verification requirement**

A voter must sign the certificate on the absent voter ballot envelope before returning the envelope containing the ballot to the clerk. By signing the certificate, the voter verifies their eligibility to vote, the secrecy of their ballot, and the lawful return of their ballot.

An absent voter application with Power of Attorney (POA) signature in lieu of the voter's signature cannot be accepted. The Michigan Election Law allows a voter unable to sign due to physical impairment to make a "mark" or to use a signature stamp.

Upon receipt of a returned absent voter ballot envelope, the clerk must verify the voter's identity by checking that the voter's signature on the certificate matches the voter's signature on file in the Qualified Voter File



(QVF). Just as with absent voter ballot applications, a signature is invalid only if it differs in significant and obvious respects from the voter's signature on file. Slight dissimilarities must be resolved in favor of the voter, and an exact signature match is not necessary to determine that a signature agrees sufficiently with the signature on file. Because signatures on absent voter ballot applications have already been checked against the QVF and found to match prior to the absent voter ballot being issued, a clerk may check the signature on the absent voter ballot envelope against the voter's signature on their *Absent Voter Ballot Application* in lieu of checking the signature against the voter's signature stored in the QVF.

If the voter fails to sign the certificate or if the signature on the certificate does not match the signature on the voter's registration record, the ballot cannot be removed from the envelope, transported to an absent voter counting board, or counted unless the signature mismatch is cured. The ballot should be marked rejected in the QVF. **The clerk should immediately contact the voter and instruct the voter to visit the clerk's office to sign their absent voter ballot envelope or cure the mismatched signature on the absent voter ballot envelope.** If the voter is unable to sign their absent voter ballot envelope or otherwise cure their signature, the original ballot may be spoiled and the voter may be issued a replacement ballot. The voter must make a request for a new ballot in writing.

For further guidance on reviewing signatures, contacting voters, and curing missing or mismatched signatures, refer to [Signature Verification, Voter Notification, and Signature Cure](#) in the eLearning Center.

## **XIV. Retrieval of absent voter ballot by election official**

A clerk is required to retrieve a voter's completed absent voter ballot from the voter if all the following conditions are satisfied:

- The clerk issued the absent voter ballot to the voter.
- The voter is unable to return the ballot using any permitted return options.



- The voter contacts the clerk to request retrieval of the voter's completed absent voter ballot before 5 p.m. on the Friday immediately prior to Election Day.
- The clerk does not need to travel outside of their jurisdiction to retrieve the ballot.

A clerk is permitted, but not required, to retrieve a completed absent voter ballot from a voter if the voter contacts the clerk to request retrieval after 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to Election Day or if the absent voter ballot is located outside of the clerk's jurisdiction.

Clerks or election assistants authorized to pick up absent voter ballots must carry appropriate credentials and show those credentials to the voter at the voter's request. An election official should not retrieve a voter's completed absent voter ballot without a request for retrieval from the voter.

## **XV. Ballot drop boxes**

Absent voter ballot drop boxes allow voters, or anyone authorized to be in possession of a voter's completed absent voter ballot or *Absent Voter Ballot Application*, to quickly and easily deliver completed absent voter ballots to the clerk. Proposal 2022-2 enshrined in the Michigan Constitution each voter's right to a state-funded absent voter ballot drop box. Each municipality must have at least one absent voter ballot drop box, and for municipalities with more than 15,000 voters, one absent voter drop box for each 15,000 registered voters. Voters may use drop boxes to return absent voter ballot applications and marked absent voter ballots in sealed envelopes. For Bureau of Election guidance on locations, security, staffing and ballot retrieval, signage, and other considerations, refer to [Absent Voter Ballot Drop Box Instructions](#) in the eLearning Center. Absent voter ballot drop boxes must be distributed equitably throughout the municipality. In determining AV drop box locations, municipal clerks must, at minimum consider all of the following:

- Population density and distribution
- Proximity to public transportation and parking
- Accessibility, including for electors with disabilities
- Any other factors the clerk considers relevant



The Michigan Election Law requires that absent voter ballot drop boxes conform to the following requirements.

All AV drop boxes must be:

- Clearly labeled as an Absent Voter Ballot Drop Box that can be used to return completed absent voter applications and voted absent voter ballots.
- Securely locked, affixed to the ground or another stationary object and designed to prevent removal of applications and ballots when locked.
- Secured to prevent the AV drop box from being removed from its location.
- Accessible 24 hours each day during the 40 days before Election Day and until 8 p.m. on Election Day.
- Equipped with a single slot or mailbox-style lever to allow absent voter ballot applications and absent voter ballot return envelopes to be placed in the AV drop box, and all other openings on the AV drop box must be securely locked.
- Regularly inspected to confirm that the AV drop box complies with all requirements, beginning 75 days before each election and until Election Day.
- Located in a publicly accessible, well-lit area with good visibility.
- Video monitored by the municipal clerk to ensure effective monitoring of that AV drop box, beginning 75 days before each election and until Election Day.
  - Only applies to AV drop boxes that were not ordered or installed before October 1, 2020.
  - Beginning January 1, 2026, all AV drop boxes must be video monitored, regardless of when it was ordered or installed.
- Subject to immediate reporting to local law enforcement if vandalism or suspicious activity occurs in the immediate vicinity of the AV drop box.

Only a clerk, deputy clerk, or sworn member of the clerk's staff can collect absent ballots from the drop box. Ballots that have been deposited into ballot drop boxes by 8 p.m. on Election Day must be collected and counted.



75 days before each election and until Election Day, an authorized individual must regularly inspect each absent voter ballot drop box used in that city or township to confirm that the absent voter ballot drop box complies with all listed requirements.

Beginning 35 days before each election and until Election Day, an authorized individual must collect, on any day in which the city or township clerk's office is open for business, the election materials deposited in an absent voter ballot drop box located in the city or township. Those materials must be immediately returned to the city or township clerk's office.

All absent voter ballot return envelopes collected from an absent voter ballot drop box must be transported in an approved ballot container.

Collection from any drop box located off grounds of the city or township clerk's office or satellite office must be documented utilizing a collection log. A [customizable template of the collection log](#) is available in the eLearning Center.

## **XVI. Military and overseas voters and accessible absent voter ballot envelopes**

The completed ballots of military and overseas voters, as well as the completed ballots of voters using accessible ballots, will not arrive in standard ballot return envelopes. These voters receive their ballots electronically and do not receive an absent voter ballot return envelope, so they cannot return their ballot in such an envelope. Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots (FWAB), MOVE ballots that have been printed and returned, and accessible ballots that have been printed and returned, will likely arrive in plain envelopes. Clerks should check their incoming mail for plain envelopes that look like they may contain the completed ballots of military and overseas voters, as well as the completed ballots of voters using accessible ballots. Some indicators that a plain envelope may contain such a ballot include envelopes that have "Official Ballot Material" written on them and envelopes with a signature on the back of the envelope.

If an envelope containing the completed ballot of a military and overseas voter, or the completed ballot of a voter who used an accessible ballot, is accidentally opened before Election Day, the envelope should be



immediately resealed and placed with other returned absent voter ballots for processing on Election Day.

## **XVII. Spoiling an absent voter ballot**

Voters have a right to spoil an absent voter ballot that has been received but not yet tabulated by the clerk. After the ballot has been spoiled, the voter must be issued a new absent voter ballot. The voter's request to spoil their ballot must be made in writing and must be signed by the voter.

There are three ballot-spoiling scenarios, and each has different timing requirements. Those scenarios are explained in the following sections:

### **Voter did not receive their absent voter ballot**

A voter who requested but never received their absent voter ballot may request that the ballot sent to them by the clerk be spoiled and a new ballot be issued. If the request is made before 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election, the voter may request the clerk mail the newly issued absent voter ballot to the voter, or the voter may opt to complete the ballot in person at the clerk's office. If the request is made after 5 p.m. on the Friday before the election, but before 4 p.m. on the day before the election, the voter may only be issued a new ballot by appearing in person at the clerk's office. In that case, the voter must complete and return the newly issued absent voter ballot in the clerk's office; the voter cannot leave the office with the ballot.

A voter who requested but did not receive their absent voter ballot may opt to vote in person at their polling place on Election Day instead of requesting a new absent voter ballot. The voter must complete an *Affidavit of Lost or Destroyed Absent Voter Ballot* at their precinct when they appear to vote, and then will be permitted to cast a normal ballot. A voter who signs the *Affidavit of Lost or Destroyed Absent Voter Ballot* may be subject to challenge by a properly credentialed election challenger as an absent voter in the polls.

### **Voter received but did not return their absent voter ballot**

A voter who requested and received, but did not return, their absent voter ballot may request that the ballot sent to them by the clerk be spoiled and a new ballot be issued. If the request is made before 5 p.m. on the Friday



prior to the election, the voter may request the clerk mail the newly issued absent voter ballot to the voter, or the voter may opt to complete the ballot in person at the clerk's office. If the request is made after 5 p.m. on the Friday before the election, but before 4 p.m. on the day before the election, the voter may only be issued a new ballot by appearing in person at the clerk's office. In that case, the voter must complete and return the newly issued absent voter ballot in the clerk's office; the voter cannot leave the office with the ballot.

A voter who requested and received, but did not return, their absent voter ballot may opt to vote in person at their polling place on Election Day instead of requesting a new absent voter ballot. The voter must complete an *Affidavit of Lost or Destroyed Absent Voter Ballot* at their precinct when they appear to vote, and then will be permitted to cast a normal ballot. Alternatively, the voter may surrender their absent voter ballot to the election inspectors at the precinct, and then will be permitted to cast a regular ballot.

A voter who surrenders their absent voter ballot to election inspectors in the polling place is not subject to a challenge as an absent voter in the polls. A voter who signs the *Affidavit of Lost or Destroyed Absent Voter Ballot* may be subject to challenge by a properly credentialed election challenger as an absent voter in the polls.

## **Voter received and returned their absent voter ballot**

### *Voter's signature verified by clerk*

A voter who requested, received, and returned their absent voter ballot, and whose ballot was accepted by the clerk after the voter's signature was found to match the signature on file with the clerk, may request that their returned absent voter ballot be spoiled by the clerk and that the clerk issue them a new absent voter ballot. If the request is made before 5 p.m. on the second Friday prior to the election, the voter may request the clerk mail the newly issued absent voter ballot to the voter, or the voter may opt to complete the ballot in person at the clerk's office. A voter cannot request that a returned and accepted absent voter ballot be spoiled after 5 p.m. on the second Friday prior to Election Day. Additionally, once tabulated, ballots cannot be spoiled for any reason.





A voter who requested, received, and returned their absent voter ballot, and whose ballot was accepted by the clerk after the voter's signature was found to match the signature on file with the clerk, cannot request that their ballot be spoiled on Election Day. Such a voter is not eligible to cast a ballot at their precinct on Election Day.

### *Voter's signature not verified by clerk*

A voter who requested, received, and returned their absent voter ballot, but whose ballot was not accepted by the clerk after the voter's signature was found not to match the signature on file with the clerk, is treated in the same manner as a voter who requested but never received their absent voter ballot for the purposes of ballot spoilation.

Such a voter may request that their ballot be spoiled. If the request is made before 5 p.m. on the Friday prior to the election, the voter may request the clerk mail the newly issued absent voter ballot to the voter, or the voter may opt to complete the ballot in person at the clerk's office. If the request is made after 5 p.m. on the Friday before the election, but before 4 p.m. on the day before the election, the voter may only be issued a new ballot by appearing in person at the clerk's office. In that case, the voter must complete and return the newly issued absent voter ballot in the clerk's office; the voter cannot leave the office with the ballot.

A voter whose returned ballot was not accepted by the clerk after the voter's signature was found not to match the signature on file with the clerk may opt to vote in person at their polling place on Election Day instead of requesting a new absent voter ballot. The voter must complete an *Affidavit of Lost or Destroyed Absent Voter Ballot* at their precinct when they appear to vote, and then will be permitted to cast a regular ballot.

In addition to spoilation, a voter whose returned ballot was not accepted by the clerk after the voter's signature was found not to match the signature on file with the clerk may appear in person at the clerk's office to cure the signature issue by verifying that the signature on the absent voter ballot envelope is the voter's signature. Voters may cure a missing or mismatched signature on a returned ballot envelope until 5 p.m. on the Friday after Election Day. The voter should contact their clerk for more information about the signature cure process.



## **Surrendered ballots**

A voter who has received an absent voter ballot but who wishes to vote a new ballot in person at their polling place on Election Day may surrender their absent voter ballot to their clerk prior to Election Day or may surrender their absent voter ballot to election inspectors at their polling place on Election Day. To surrender an absent voter ballot, the voter should write "I am surrendering my ballot" on the absent voter ballot envelope and sign the envelope. A clerk receiving a surrendered ballot prior to Election Day should mark the ballot as surrendered in the QVF. A voter who has surrendered their absent voter ballot cannot be issued a new absent voter ballot; the voter's only opportunity to vote after surrendering their absent voter ballot is to appear at their polling place on Election Day.

## **XVIII. Deceased or incarcerated absent voters**

If a clerk receives notice that a voter has died within the 40 days before an election, they must check whether that voter was issued an absent voter ballot. If the notice that the voter is deceased comes after the voter has completed and returned their absent voter ballot, but before that ballot's tabulation, the local clerk should reject and should not tabulate the absent voter ballot.

Additionally, if a clerk is certain that a voter is currently serving a sentence in jail or prison, and is thus ineligible to vote, the voter's ballot should be rejected. In either case, the clerk should write "rejected as illegal" on the absent voter ballot return envelope and record the rejection and the reason for the rejection in the QVF.

A person who is incarcerated in a jail awaiting trial or sentencing is permitted to vote in Michigan. A clerk should not reject a person's ballot solely because the person is currently incarcerated. Instead, the clerk must verify that the person has been found guilty and has been sentenced to a term of incarceration before the clerk rejects the person's ballot.



## **XIX. Posting absent voter information**

For any election involving a state or federal office, clerks are required to make the following public postings:

- Before 8 a.m. on Election Day, the clerk must publicly post the number of absent voter ballots distributed to absent voters and the number of absent voter ballots received before Election Day and to be delivered to the board of election inspectors or absent voter counting boards for tabulation on Election Day.
- Immediately upon completion of all precinct returns, the clerk must publicly post the total number of absent voter ballots tabulated for the election.

The Bureau has developed a form that clerks may use to report this information; that form is included in *Appendix I*.

## **XX. Required recording of AV Ballot information in the QVF**

Clerks are required to immediately record the sending and receipt of absent voter ballots in the Absent Voter module of the QVF. This module provides an easy and efficient way for election officials to print absent voter ballot applications and ballot labels and to manage the list of voters sent ballots as required by law. Immediate recording of sent and received absent voter ballots also allows voters to track the status of their absent voter ballot via [Michigan.Gov/Vote](https://Michigan.Gov/Vote). Information regarding which absent ballots have been sent and received is also included in the e-pollbook download of voter information in the electronic pollbook on Election Day and communicated in real time to the Early Voting Electronic Pollbook. This information must be kept current to ensure that election inspectors do not issue an in-person ballot to any voter whose absent voter ballot has already been returned to and accepted by the clerk.



## **XXI. Voting after registering to vote or updating voter registrations on Election Day**

In Michigan, voters may register to vote and obtain an absent voter ballot in the same transaction. The period where a voter may register and obtain an absent voter ballot starts 40 days prior to the election and runs until 8 p.m. on Election Day. While the deadline for persons who are registered to vote at their current address to request an absent voter ballot is 4 p.m. on the Monday before Election Day, eligible persons may register to vote or update their registration to reflect their new address and receive an absent voter ballot that must be voted in the clerk's office until 8 p.m. on Election Day. A person registering to vote or updating their address on Election Day also has the option of bringing the QVF receipt printed after their successful registration to their precinct and casting a ballot in person at that precinct on Election Day.

The availability of absent voter ballots in Michigan tightens the timelines for clerks to prepare electronic pollbooks containing all relevant absent voter ballot information for Election Day. Clerks in jurisdictions with 50 or fewer precincts are required to export electronic pollbook lists from the QVF after 4 p.m. on the day before the election to ensure that the electronic pollbook has the current information for all voters who requested absent voter ballots or who registered to vote and cast an absent voter ballot on the Monday prior to election.

## **XXII. Issuing AV ballots to election-eligible voters who have moved**

Voters frequently move during the 40-day absent voting period that precedes every election. Consult the following graphic to determine where such voters are eligible to vote and how the clerk of each jurisdiction should process those voters.



Voter appears in person at "B" to register to vote and obtain an AV ballot

Voter has been issued AV Ballot in "A" (QVF will show this). Did the voter return the ballot to Clerk A?

If the ballot from "A" has **not** been returned, Clerk B may register the voter and issue an AV ballot

If the ballot from "A" is subsequently returned, QVF will not accept the ballot. This ballot should be rejected by Clerk A

If the ballot has been received by Clerk A and the voter wishes to register and vote in "B", the voter must contact Clerk A in writing to request their ballot to be rejected

Clerk B will register the voter. The voter's eligibility in "B" will not be valid until after the election. No ballot may be issued.

If ballot A is rejected by Clerk A, voter may be eligible for the election.

If the voter wishes to have ballot A count, Clerk B will select *Not Registering for this Election* from the QVF Residency Verification drop down list

- "A" refers to Jurisdiction A
- "B" refers to Jurisdiction B



## **XXIII. Reporting postal service issues**

Any clerk experiencing recurring issues with mail delivery may report those issues at [electionmail.org](https://electionmail.org). This website aggregates and tracks postal issues and the U.S. Postal Service's response. Reports made to [electionmail.org](https://electionmail.org) by election officials in Michigan are forwarded to the Bureau of Elections. Issues that may be reported at [electionmail.org](https://electionmail.org) include:

- Delivery delays
- Damaged mail
- Lost mail
- Undeliverable or returned mail
- Misdirected mail

Please be as detailed as possible when reporting issues to [electionmail.org](https://electionmail.org). If possible, include specific addresses and mailing dates to assist USPS in identifying which postal facilities may be involved.

