Pennsylvania Election Law in a Nutshell: Summary & FAQs

VOTER REGISTRATION

Who can register to vote?
To vote in PA you must be:
- A US Citizen for at least 30 days before the election
- At least 17 years old and will be 18 years old on election day
- A resident of PA for at least 30 days
- Not currently incarcerated or transferred to a half-way house as a condition for release on account of a felony conviction, or confined to a mental institution.

What is the registration deadline?
Completed voter registration applications must be received in the voter registration office of the county of residence or post-marked no later than 30 days before the election. (October 9 for the 2012 election)

Where can I register to vote?
- In person at the county voter registration office;
- By mailing an application to the county voter registration office;
- When applying for or renewing a driver’s license;
- at any public assistance agency, orphans’ court, marriage license bureau, any agency providing state-funded services to persons with disabilities, and all armed forces recruitment centers.

Can I register by mail?
Yes. You can obtain a mail-in application here: http://www.votespa.com

What is required to register?
You must complete and submit a voter registration application. This form will request basic personal information. You must provide a party affiliation if you want to vote in any primary election.

Do I need to show proof of identification to register to vote?
No. But you must include your driver’s license number on the registration form. If you don’t have a driver’s license, you must include the last 4 digits of your Social Security number. If you do not have either, you may still register to vote, just indicate that you don’t have those numbers.

What if I’m homeless?
You can identify a fixed location as your residence – such as a shelter, park bench, or other place where you stay. You’ll need to provide a mailing address where you can receive mail such as a post office box, general delivery at a post office or homeless shelter.

Will I be notified when my registration is accepted?
Yes. If your application is accepted, the county registration office will mail your voter registration card to your mailing address. This will inform you of your polling location.

If you don’t receive confirmation within 2 weeks of submitting your application, you should contact your county voter services office to follow up.

How do I know if my registration is denied or incomplete?
If your application is incomplete, or there are other problems with your application, you will receive a letter from the voter registration office within 14 days of receipt of your application. You will be instructed on how to complete your application. If your application was denied, you can appeal the denial.

What if my address has changed since I registered to vote?
- You’ll need to re-register before the deadline or change your address at the polls on Election Day.
Remember: you can vote at your old polling location and update your address on Election Day

AT THE POLLS

***IMPORTANT: Pennsylvania will require Photo ID from every voter who appears to vote on Election Day. Make sure you have the proper ID!

Do I need any identification to vote?
Yes. Starting in November 2012, every voter must provide proof of identification. The following is a list of acceptable identification:
- A valid driver’s license or non-driver photo ID issued by the Department of Transportation (PennDOT)
- A valid photo ID issued by the Commonwealth
- A valid photo ID issued by the United States Government
- A valid United States passport
- A valid photo ID issued by an accredited Pennsylvania college or university
- A valid photo ID issued by a Pennsylvania municipality to an employee of the municipality
- A valid United States military or Pennsylvania National Guard photo ID, or
- A valid Pennsylvania care facility photo ID

All IDs must have a photo, the voter’s name that substantially conforms to the voter’s name on the voter registration rolls and an expiration date. The ID must not be expired, except for PennDOT IDs which may be expired for 12 months or less. Military IDs may indicate that the expiration date is “indefinite.”

Are there any exceptions to the Photo ID rule?
Yes. A voter with a religious objection to being photographed may present a valid-without-photo ID. Such IDs are issued by PennDOT. A voter who is indigent and does not have an acceptable ID must be given a provisional ballot. The voter must then sign an affirmation that she is indigent and cannot obtain acceptable ID without the payment of a fee. This must be provided to the county Board of Elections within 6 days of the election.

What if I don’t have one of the IDs on the list?
Before Election Day, you can obtain a non-driver photo ID from a PennDOT driver’s license center with proper documentation. You can find the list of items needed here: http://www.dmv.state.pa.us/voter/voteridlaw.shtml.

If you can’t get a PennDOT ID, you can get a special just-for-voting ID issued by the Department of State and also available at PennDOT driver’s license centers. Information about the DOS ID is available here: http://www.votespa.com

Call 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline for help.

On Election Day, if you do not have ID, you can vote by provisional ballot. You have 6 days within which to obtain a valid ID and present it to the county board of elections for your ballot to be counted.

How can I find my polling place?
You can contact your county voter registration office, or look up your polling place online here: http://www.votespa.com

How much time do I have to cast my ballot?
Pennsylvania law allots each voter three minutes in the voting booth.

What time do the polls open and close?
All polls open at 7am and close at 8pm.

What if I’m in line when the polling place closes, but haven’t voted yet?
You are entitled to vote. Any voter waiting in line to vote (whether inside or outside) when the polls close must be permitted to vote.

What if I registered, but my name doesn’t appear at the polling place?
If you’re not on the poll list, confirm that you’re at the correct polling place. You can also ask the poll worker to call the county voter registration office to confirm your registration. If you are in the incorrect polling place, go to the correct one. If you believe you were registered and omitted from the poll book, you are entitled to a provisional ballot.
Are any activities prohibited at the polls?
Yes.
- Campaigning or electioneering may not occur in the polling place or within 10 feet of the door.
- Police officers may not be within 100 feet of a polling place.
- Intimidation or coercion of voters, directly or indirectly, through the use of force, violence, or threats of violence to vote or refrain from voting is illegal.
- Employers may not influence employees’ election choices through endorsements of candidates or threats of repercussions if certain candidates win or lose.

What if I need voting assistance?
You are entitled to voting assistance if you cannot read or write, cannot read the names on the ballots, have difficulty understanding English, are blind, disabled or unable to operate the voting machine. You may select any individual to help you vote, as long as the individual is not the judge of election, your employer, union representative, or an employer/union agent. To receive language assistance, you may either apply for assistance at least 10 days before the Election at the county voter services office or sign a declaration stating the need for assistance and the reason at the polling place on Election Day.

Can my child enter the polling booth with me?
Yes, but only one child may accompany you into the voting booth.

What if I have a disability?
All polling places must be accessible to voters with disabilities. If a voter with a disability is assigned to an inaccessible polling place, the voter is entitled to cast an alternative ballot, which is the same as an absentee ballot.

Can my right to vote be challenged?
Yes, but only for certain reasons. A person whose name appears in the poll book and presents a valid ID may only be challenged as to identity and residency. A poll worker, poll watcher or other voter in the polling place may challenge a voter. In addition, the validity of a voter’s ID may be challenged by poll workers.

What happens if my vote is challenged?
You will be questioned about the basis for the challenge (e.g. identity or residency), and then asked to affirm that you are eligible to vote. Also, you must provide another registered voter to affirm your identity and residency. If you are able to do so, you will be allowed to vote. If the validity of ID is challenged, you must vote by provisional ballot and then present your ID to the county board of elections within 6 calendar days of the Election. The county Board of Elections will then determine if your provisional ballot will be counted.

EARLY AND ABSENTEE VOTING

Does Pennsylvania have early voting?
No.

Who can vote by absentee ballot?
- Voters who are serving in the armed services, Merchant Marine, or who are outside the United States because of business and their accompanying spouses and dependents
- Voters who are absent from their municipality because of work
- Voters who cannot attend their polling place because of illness or disability or veterans who are bedridden or hospitalized
- Voters who are county employees and cannot vote at the polling place because of duties relating to the conduct of the election.
- Voters who cannot attend because of observance of a religious holiday

How do I request an absentee ballot?
Voters who are already registered may request absentee ballots in the following ways:
- By mailing a completed state or federal application form to the county voter registration office;
- In person at the county voter services office
- By submitting a written request an absentee ballot

Voters who are serving in the armed forces may request an absentee ballot even if they are not registered. Absentee ballots must be received in the county Board of Elections by 5 p.m. on the Tuesday before the election.
If I’m a first-time voter can I vote absentee?
Yes. However, you must first register to vote, then request an absentee ballot.

Do absentee voters need to provide ID?
No. However, for the November 2012 election, applicants for absentee ballots must provide their driver’s license number, or if they don’t have a driver’s license, the last 4 digits of their Social Security number. If they have neither, they must provide a copy of one of the IDs acceptable for voting at the polls.

What is the deadline for casting an absentee ballot?
The completed absentee ballot must be received at the county board of elections office, (not postmarked) by 5 pm on the Friday before the election.

What if I get sick or have to leave on business after the Tuesday before the election?
You can apply for an emergency absentee ballot but the completed ballot must be delivered by 5:00 pm on the Friday before the election.

For additional information, please contact:
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