



Florida Fair Elections Coalition
Deland, FL
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The Florida Voter's Vote-by-Mail Fact Sheet

By Kitty Garber, FFEC, September 30, 2020

Who Can Vote by Mail?

While some states have considered changes to their mail-in balloting laws because of the pandemic, Florida has had no need to do so. No-excuse absentee balloting has been the law here for nearly two decades. This means that *any Florida voter may vote by mail*, without giving a reason. Before the 2016 election, the legislature changed the word “absentee” to “vote-by-mail” in the Florida Statutes for the purpose of clarifying that voters did not need to be absent in order to take advantage of this voting method. But only the wording changed.

Who Votes by Mail?

Voting by mail is popular in Florida. In most elections, between a fourth and a third of all votes are cast by mail. Once, vote-by-mail was more popular among Republicans than Democrats. But partisan differences have faded as both major political parties have pushed this method of voting. The main demographic difference between those who vote by mail and in-person voters is age. Voters over the age of 65 favor this method more than do younger voters. Given the fact that COVID-19 poses such a serious risk to Florida seniors, it is likely that even greater numbers of older voters will choose to vote by mail this year.

Will A Big Increase in Vote-by-Mail Delay Reporting of Results?

Many have raised the concern that an overload of mail-in ballots will cause delays in tabulating the results of the election. Laws concerning the handling and tabulation of vote-by-mail ballots vary from state to state, but in Florida, the law allows counties to begin processing vote-by-mail ballots twenty-two days before Election Day. Results, however, cannot be divulged until after the polls close on Election Day. Most counties use high-speed scanners to process stacks of vote-by-mail ballots with lightning speed. Even with a big increase in the number of ballots, most counties should be able to process in advance all ballots but those that arrive on Election Day or which require review by the canvassing board because of signature or other problems. If a ballot is rejected for no signature or a signature that doesn't match the one on record, then the voter has until 5:00 p.m. on the Thursday following the election (Nov. 5th) to correct the problem. But this process does not delay posting of preliminary results. So when results are uploaded on Election Night, absentee results are often among the first to be posted.

How Do I Request a Vote-By-Mail Ballot?

Any Florida voter can request to receive a vote-by-mail ballot, but to receive one by mail, the request must be received by 5:00 p.m., ten days before Election Day. This year, that date is October 24th. After that time, requested ballots can be picked up in person at the elections office.

Vote-by-mail ballots can be requested in person at the elections office, by mail, phone, fax, e-mail, or online at the elections website. (Volusia voters can click [here](#) to request a ballot online.)

Voters who sign up for vote-by-mail have the option of receiving a vote-by-mail ballot for every election through the 2022 general election. They should understand, however, that by law ballots cannot be forwarded so they must make sure their mailing address is correct before each election during that period.

How Can I Be Sure My Ballot Will Be Counted?

In every Florida election, thousands of vote-by-mail ballots are rejected for a variety of reasons, but the most common one is failure to arrive on time. *The most important thing you can do to make sure your ballot is counted is to ensure that it arrives in your county elections office before 7 p.m. on Election Day.* The second most common problem is lack of signatures or signatures that do not match what is on file. Voters now have two days after the election to correct signature problems, but votes are still discarded in every election because of signature issues or other problems. Here's our advice for making sure your ballot is counted.

1. **Be prepared to vote.** Even before your vote-by-mail ballot arrives, do your homework. Your county website allows you to look at a sample ballot identical to the one you will receive. Print your sample ballot and mark it in advance with your choices. Make sure you read the amendments carefully. A number of organizations, including the Florida League of Women Voters, put out helpful, nonpartisan voter guides that include information on the amendments.
2. **Read the instructions carefully before making any marks on your ballot.** This may seem obvious, but it is surprising how many people do not read and follow the instructions. If you don't follow instructions carefully, your votes may not count.
3. **Do not make stray marks, notations, or comments on your ballot.** The tabulator can misinterpret these as attempts to make a selection in a race and invalidate your vote.
4. **Do not attempt to correct mistakes; ask for a new ballot.** If you make a mistake when marking the ballot, do attempt to cross out or erase it. You will need to call the elections office and ask for a new ballot. Otherwise, your vote in the affected race could be voided.
5. **Make sure you sign where indicated.** Do not sign your actual ballot. Instead, make sure you sign the ballot envelope where indicated. Without your signature, your ballot will not be counted.
6. **Check postage.** In Volusia County, the ballot return envelope is postage paid. So you don't have to worry about postage. Some counties, however, require the voter to pay the postage. Without adequate postage, your ballot will not be delivered via the postal service.
7. **Mail or drop off your ballot as soon as possible. To be counted, it must be received by the county elections office no later than 7:00 p.m. Election Day. Postmarks don't**

count. The post office recommends ten days to make sure your ballot arrives on time. This may seem extreme, but consider the situation in Volusia County: A ballot mailed in Deland goes first to Orlando before being sent back to the elections office in Deland. If possible, avoid the uncertainties of the mail and drop off your ballot at a nearby early voting site (but only during voting hours) or the county elections office. Drop boxes are located both inside and outside at all early voting sites.

8. **Make sure you track your ballot.** It is easy to track your ballot using the link on the county elections website, and it is absolutely essential that you do so. After receipt of your request for a vote-by-mail ballot, the supervisor of elections has two days to mail out your ballot. The link will let you see when your request was received and when the ballot was mailed to you. After you mail or drop off your ballot, you will be able to see when the elections office acknowledges receipt. This link will allow you to catch any problems with your ballot in time to correct them.
9. **Remember if you have problems with voting by mail,** you can still vote in person if your ballot has not yet been received by the elections office. Take your ballot to an early voting location during voting hours or to your polling place on Election Day. The poll worker will cancel your vote-by-mail ballot and give you a regular ballot that you can mark and place in the scanner yourself. During early voting, the poll worker is able to check the status of your vote-by-mail ballot online and cancel it if it has not yet arrived.

For further information on vote by mail, go to the state of Florida's online vote-by-mail information site by clicking [here](#). If you still have questions about voting by mail or any other voting issue, check out your county elections website or call your supervisor of elections.