

The Basics of Absentee Ballot Voting in Atlantic County

In 2005 the New Jersey Legislature passed what has been referred to as the “No Excuses” Absentee Ballot Law. Voters in New Jersey no longer need to indicate a reason for voting by absentee ballot. Any qualified, registered voter may vote by absentee ballot.

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

APPLICATIONS FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Absentee ballots are not automatically sent to voters. A voter must apply for an absentee ballot using the standard absentee ballot form. Generally, a voter must submit an absentee ballot application for each election in which he or she wishes to vote by absentee ballot.

There are two exceptions to that rule, however. First, under State law, a permanently and totally disabled has the option, with one application, to request receiving absentee ballots for all elections held within the calendar year. (Check the A option on the application.) This request is limited to one calendar year. The County Clerk’s Office keeps such voters on record and, at the beginning of each year, sends an application to them. Second, under federal law, the federal postcard application for an absentee ballot, which is available for all military and overseas civilian voters, is good for all federal elections through the next two regularly scheduled federal elections.

In addition, State law allows all voters to request to be automatically sent an absentee ballot *application* for every general election. (Check the B option on the application.)

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

THE DEADLINE

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

MESSENGER ABSENTEE BALLOTS

If a voter is sick or confined, he or she may designate a person to be an “authorized messenger” to deliver the application and pick up an absentee ballot for the voter from the County Clerk’s Office. The absentee ballot application provides a place whereby the vote can, by his or her signature, name the person to act as the authorized messenger for the ballot.

The authorized messenger must be a family member of the voter or a registered voter in Atlantic County.

The authorized messenger must sign the certification on the absentee ballot application in which he or she certifies that the ballot will be delivered directly to the voter and to no other person.

The authorized messenger must show a photo identification to the County Clerk's election staff when the application is delivered and must sign the certification on the ballot in the presence of the County Clerk's election staff.

APPLICATIONS FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS MAY BE REJECTED

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

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

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

FIRST TIME VOTERS

Any voter who registered to vote by mail from January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2005 is required to provide identification to complete his or her registration. That identification may be a driver's license number, the last four digits of his or her social security number, or a copy of some other identifying document. Voters in this category who apply for an absentee ballot will receive a notice with their ballot to provide identification.

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

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

HOW TO VOTE WITH AN ABSENTEE BALLOT.

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

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

COMPLETION OF THE ABSENTEE BALLOT

All completed absentee ballots must be delivered or mailed to the County Board of Elections. No ballots can be delivered to the polling place on Election Day. Any voter can have another person mail or deliver the ballot to the Board of Elections Office. Any voter can have another voter mail or deliver the ballot to the Board of Elections. However, the voter cannot give the ballot to that person, who is known as the “bearer” unless the bearer section on the outside of the outer envelope is completed. The bearer must provide his or her name, address and signature on the envelope. This must be completed even in the bearer is simply dropping the ballot in a mailbox. No bearer can give the ballot to another person. The designated bearer must personally mail the ballot or take it to the Board of Elections. The bearer does not have to be the same person as the authorized messenger. Any person who delivers an absentee ballot to the Board of Elections will be asked to sign the “bearer book”, even if it is the voter.

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

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

Edward P. McGettigan
Atlantic County Clerk