

designed to protect voters and their ballots are impossible to enforce in the privacy of a voter's home. Scams designed to manipulate the voting process by gaining access to mail-in ballots could become a problem in Texas if voters are not well-informed.

When you vote by mail, you can take steps to protect your ballot and your vote. The most effective ways to protect your ballot are:

1. If you do vote by mail, get your application from the early voting clerk, or from the Secretary of State's office.

You can call the office holding your election and have an application for ballot by mail sent directly to you, or you can call our office and we will send you an application. If you need help filling out the form or mailing it, ask someone you trust. If someone helps you fill out the application, you must write the assistant's name and address next to your signature on the application. The person helping you must also sign the application.

All applications must be addressed to the early voting clerk. Applications mailed to an address other than the early voting clerk will be rejected.

2. Send your application as early as possible.

You may send your application for a ballot by mail up to two months before an election. This will give you plenty of time to receive your ballot, mark it and mail it back to the early voting clerk. If you don't get your ballot or some other problem occurs, this will also give you more time to cancel, if possible, and obtain another ballot.

Your Mailing Address: The general rule is that a ballot must be mailed to the address

where you are registered to vote. However, if you are 65 or older or have a physical disability, you may have your ballot sent to a hospital, nursing home or long-term care facility, retirement center, or relative, but you must check the blank on the form indicating which address you are providing.

3. If you need help reading, marking or mailing your ballot, ask a trusted relative or friend to help you.

For example:

A stranger might "show up" on your doorstep offering to help you with your ballot soon after you've received it in the mail. We recommend you decline this kind of help for several reasons. If you allow your ballot to be mailed by someone you don't know, it might not be mailed at all. Your ballot will be rejected if a common or contract carrier attempts to deliver it to the elections office from the address of a candidate or a campaign's headquarters. The safety of your vote is best assured by asking someone you know and trust to help you read, mark or mail your ballot. Remember, you must put each helper's name and address on the carrier envelope, which is the one used to return your ballot to the early voting clerk. The helpers must also sign the carrier envelope. Failure to provide required assistance information may constitute a criminal offense.

4. Know your rights as a voter.

It is our hope that the examples in this publication cover most of the fraudulent tactics you may encounter, but if a situation arises and you don't know what to do, please call our office. Our legal staff is available toll-free at 1.800.252.VOTE (8683) to advise you on your rights as a voter.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

The Secretary of State's office, your County Clerk, County Elections Administrator or the Voter Registrar in your district.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Elections Division
P.O. Box 12060
Austin, Texas 78711-2060
512.463.5650 or 1.800.252.VOTE (8683)
Fax 512.475.2811, TTY 7.1.1
www.sos.state.tx.us or www.votexas.org
Published by the Elections Division of the Secretary of State's office

This pamphlet is available in Spanish, large print, audiotape, or computer disc upon request.

Este folleto está disponible en Español, tipo de imprenta más grande, cinta magnética para audio, o disco para computadora. Para conseguir una de estas versiones por favor llame sin cargo a la oficina del Secretario de Estado al 1.800.252.VOTE (8683).

**Avoid the lines,
VOTE EARLY!**

**Early
Voting
in Texas**

Thank you for your interest in Texas democracy and the election process. The Elections Division has prepared this brochure for use by citizens and election officials at the state, county, city and other political subdivision levels.

This brochure is designed to inform you about the early voting election process in Texas.

The Elections Division of the Secretary of State's office is open from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. weekdays, and during the hours that the polls are open on all uniform election dates (i.e., 2nd Saturday in May and 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday in November) and primary elections. Answers to questions on election law and procedures may be obtained by telephoning the Elections Division toll-free at 1.800.252.VOTE (8683) or direct at 512.463.5650.

For additional information on election dates, deadlines, election law opinions or election returns, please visit our website at

www.sos.state.tx.us

Again, thank you for your interest in early voting. Please become familiar with the instructions, guidelines and examples in this brochure to cast an informed ballot.

Office of the Secretary of State
Elections Division

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO VOTE EARLY IN TEXAS.

1. Early Voting in Person

Early voting in person may be easier than you think. You don't have to stand in long lines on Election Day. Registered voters may vote early at a location convenient to them within their political subdivision. Early voting in person starts 17 days (or 12 days for a May Election) before each Election Day (unless the first day falls on the

weekend, then early voting begins on the following Monday,) and ends 4 days before each Election Day. If you can drive, or if you have a friend or relative who can drive you, you don't even have to get out of the car. Call ahead to notify the early voting clerk that you want to vote from your car. This procedure is called "curbside voting" and is available to any voter who has difficulty walking or standing for long periods. The election official will bring your ballot to your car outside the polling place. Curbside voting is available during early voting and on Election Day. Texas law requires all early and Election Day polling locations to be physically accessible to voters with disabilities. Call your election official for information on your particular voting sites.

2. Early Voting by Mail

You may vote early by mail if you are:

- ★ going to be away from your county on Election Day and during early voting;
- ★ sick or disabled;
- ★ 65 years of age or older on Election Day; or
- ★ confined in jail, but eligible to vote.

Applications for a ballot by mail must be submitted to the early voting clerk on or after the 60th day before Election Day and before the close of business on the 7th day before Election Day. If the 7th day is a weekend, the last day to submit an application is the preceding Friday.

If you are voting early by mail you must send your application by:

- ★ regular mail;

- ★ common or contract carrier; or
- ★ FAX (if a FAX machine is available to the early voting clerk and if you are submitting your application from outside the county).

Exception:

- ★ If you are voting early because of expected absence, you may apply in person for a ballot by mail before the first day of early voting in person (usually the 17th day before the election).

You may obtain a formal application from the Secretary of State's office or the early voting clerk in your county. You do not have to use a formal application; however, an informal application must be in writing and include:

- a. your signature (or a witness' signature if you cannot sign);
- b. your name and the address at which you are registered to vote;
- c. the address to which the ballot is to be mailed;
- d. the election date and for which election you are requesting a ballot (for a primary election, you must state the political party's primary in which you wish to vote); and
- e. a reason why you are eligible to vote early by mail (to be eligible to vote early due to expected absence from the county, your application must state an address out-of-county to have your ballot mailed).

The early voting clerk must receive your marked ballot by 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Exception:

- ★ If you are mailing your ballot from outside the United States, the early voting clerk must receive your ballot by the 5th day after Election Day. (You must mail it no later than 7 p.m. on Election Day).

EARLY VOTING TIMELINE:

- ★ 60 days before Election Day-first day to submit an early voting by mail application.
- ★ 17 days (or 12 days for a May Election) before Election Day-early voting in person begins.
- ★ 7 days before Election Day-last day to submit an application for ballot by mail.
- ★ 4 days before Election Day-early voting in person ends.
- ★ Election Day-marked early ballots by mail must be returned by 7 p.m., unless mailed from outside the United States.

Visit our website at www.sos.state.tx.us for:

- ★ The name/phone number/fax number/address of the early voting clerk in your county for county elections.
- ★ Dates or deadlines for the four uniform election dates, primary elections, and the November gubernatorial/presidential or constitutional amendment elections.
- ★ To request that an application for ballot by mail be mailed to you or to download an application form.

Voting by mail has been available to elderly voters and voters with physical disabilities in Texas for decades. In recent years, some candidates have built well-organized campaigns aimed at this segment of our voting population. Many of the legal safeguards