

Uniformed Services/Family Members Frequently Asked Questions



Can I vote absentee?

You can vote absentee in local, State, and Federal elections if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are an active duty member of the Armed Forces, Merchant Marine, Public Health Service, NOAA, a family member of the above, or a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States.

Do I have to be registered to vote absentee?

Requirements vary from State to State. Most States and territories require registration to vote absentee. Voter registration and absentee ballot request can be done at the same time by submitting the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA).

How do I register to vote and/or request an absentee ballot?

You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form: The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). This application form is accepted by all States and territories and is postage-paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System and State Department Pouch mail.

If mailing through a foreign postal system, you must affix the proper postage. Be sure to write "USA" after the city, State, and Zip Code of the election office.

Hard copies of the form can be obtained from your installation's Voting Assistance Officer or requested directly from FVAP. An online version of the FPCA is available at: www.fvap.gov, along with a prepaid return envelope template.

Your Federal Post Card Application must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted directly to your local election official. Some States allow it to be submitted electronically. Check www.fvap.gov to see what your State allows.

Where is my "legal voting residence"?

For voting purposes, "legal voting residence" can be the State or territory where you last resided prior to entering military service OR the State or territory that you have since claimed as your legal residence.

Even though you may no longer maintain formal ties to that residence, the address determines your proper voting jurisdiction. To claim a new legal residence, you must have simultaneous physical presence and the intent to return to that location as your primary residence.

Uniformed Service members and their eligible dependents may change their legal residence every time they change

permanent duty stations, or they may retain their legal residence without change. This may mean that the Uniformed Service member has a different legal voting residence than his/her family members. A Judge Advocate General officer or legal counsel should be consulted before legal residence is changed because there are usually other factors that should be considered besides voting.

Can I register and vote in-person where I am stationed?

Uniformed Service members may register and vote in the U.S. State or territory where stationed if they change their legal residence to that State or territory, even if they live on a military installation. Be advised that there may be legal obligations, such as taxation, if you change your State of residence. Therefore, consult a Judge Advocate General officer or legal counsel before making such a decision.

Currently, there are no provisions for in-person voting or on-site registration for personnel stationed outside the U.S. Voting Assistance Officers can assist personnel and family members in completing the Federal Post Card Application or other election materials for their State and provide other absentee voting information.

My family members are not in the military. Can they also vote absentee?

Yes. Eligible spouses and children (U.S. citizens, 18 years or older) of Uniformed Service personnel may vote absentee. Some States allow children of military personnel residing overseas who are U.S. citizens but who have never resided in the U.S. to claim one of their U.S. citizen parent's legal State of residence as their own. Check out www.fvap.gov for a list of States allowing this.

Where do I send my Federal Post Card Application?

Your Federal Post Card Application must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted directly to your local election official. These officials will handle the processing and distribution of your absentee ballots and may need to contact you for further information or clarification. To facilitate this process, please provide a current email address, phone and fax number on your application.

When mailing election materials to my State or territory, do I have to pay postage?

When mailed from any U.S. post office, U.S. embassy or consulate, or APO/FPO mail facility, the hardcopy Federal Post Card Application is postage-paid. In order to receive free postage, the online version of the form must be mailed

in an envelope printed with the prepaid return envelope template, available at: www.fvap.gov. You may also mail the completed form in an envelope with proper postage affixed. Ensure that your form is postmarked (see postmarking instructions below) and sent to arrive before your State's specific deadline. You must pay postage if the materials are mailed from a non-U.S. postal facility.

What is a postmark and how do I make sure I get one?

A postmark is a postal marking made on a piece of mail indicating the date and time that the item was accepted by the postal service. Postmarks are used to determine if voting materials have been mailed by State deadlines. Due to varying mail pick up times, the day you 'mail' your election materials may not be the day the postal facility postmarks it.

You may ask the mail clerk to hand stamp the election material so that a date is clearly visible. In certain situations a handwritten postmark and signature from you or a notarizing official may be sufficient.

How do I know if my ballot has been received?

All uniformed service members and their family members may use their State's online service to check the status of their registration and track their absentee ballots. Check your State specific instructions at www.fvap.gov.

Overseas uniformed service members and their family members with access to Military Postal Service, may use the "Prepaid Expedited Mail - Label 11-DOD." This label is available at APO/FPO locations and can only be used for the general election. It provides expedited mail service up to seven days prior to the election. You can return your ballot with this label attached at any MPO/FPO, American embassy, or consulate. A portion of the label is retained by you for tracking your ballot through the U.S. Postal Service.

When should I apply for an absentee ballot?

We recommend that you register to vote/request an absentee ballot in January of each year or whenever you change your mailing address. If you are using regular mail to register to vote, receive your absentee ballot, and return your voted ballot, please mail your FPCA 60 days before Election Day or earlier if you are living in an area where mail service is

slow or unreliable. Some States allow you to submit your FPCA electronically; check your State instructions www.fvap.gov.

When should I receive my ballot?

States are required to transmit ballots 45 days before the election. A few States have been granted waivers for the 2010 general election and will send ballots less than 45 days before the election. Check your State specific instructions at www.fvap.gov.

What happens if I do not receive a ballot?

If you requested an absentee ballot but have not received one in time to return it by the voted ballot receipt deadline, you can still vote by using the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). In order to be eligible to use this back-up ballot, you must:

- Be absent from your voting residence;
- Have applied for a regular ballot early enough so the request is received by the appropriate local election official no later than the State deadline; or the date that is 30 days before the general election; AND
- Have not received the requested regular absentee ballot from the State.

Always complete and return your State absentee ballot regardless of when you receive it, even if you have already submitted a back-up FWAB. Your local election official will ensure that only one of the ballots is counted.

Where can I get a back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot?

Hardcopies of the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) are available through Voting Assistance Officers at military installations or at U.S. embassies/consulates.

The FWAB is also available at: www.fvap.gov. It must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted to your local election official. Check out your State specific instructions, witness requirements, deadlines, and mailing addresses at: www.fvap.gov.

Your Voting Assistance Officer:

Name: _____ Location: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

Federal Voting Assistance Program, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1155
1-800-438-8683, (703)588-1584, DSN: 425-1584, vote@fvap.gov. International toll-free numbers available at www.fvap.gov

Current as of January 2011