

# Absentee voters must submit ballot request

By Karen Jowers  
kjowers@militarytimes.com

Service members and family members who plan to vote absentee this year should submit a request for an absentee ballot — regardless of how long they have been voting in their current jurisdiction.

Because of a change in law in 2009, states no longer are required to automatically send

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■ Federal Post Card Applications can be filled out online at [www.fvap.gov/resources/media/fpca.pdf](http://www.fvap.gov/resources/media/fpca.pdf).

They must be printed and mailed.

■ Other information, such as individual states' requirements, is available at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov).

absentee ballots for the next two election cycles after service members submit an absentee ballot application.

A provision in the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act repealed that requirement over the objections of the Defense Department, said Bob Carey, director of the Federal Voting Assistance program.

“Overall, the MOVE Act has substantially improved the rights of military and overseas voters, but on this one issue, the rights of these voters have retreated,” Carey said.

“We’re telling everyone to send a new Federal Post Card Application every year,” Carey said, as well as when they move to a new duty station, when they deploy and when they return from deployment.

That ensures not only that their registration is updated, but that their absentee ballot address is correct, he said.

Defense officials required voting assistance officers to give every service member an FPCA by hand or e-mail by Jan. 15. They will distribute them again in June, and whenever service members check into a new command, Carey said. Service members also can request an FPCA at any time.

Defense officials are drafting new rules that require the ballots to be handed out before and after deployments, as well.

There is at least one advantage to the change in law, said Susan Dzeduszycka-Suinat, president and chief executive officer of the Overseas Vote Foundation.

“When the ballot requests were

considered as valid for four years, the result was that election officials continued to post ballots to out-of-date addresses and the vast

majority of the ballots were returned undeliverable.

“Sometimes voters would return home only to find that they had for-

gotten to update their address and their ballot had been posted to their old overseas address,” she said. “Then they couldn’t vote locally.”

Getting a new absentee ballot request each election year from overseas and military voters increases the likelihood that addresses will be valid, she said.

The effects will more likely be felt by long-term overseas civilian voters, she said. □

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