

Lancaster County Mail-In Ballot Questions & Answers

Election forms are available at <https://lancastercountypa.gov/296/Applications-Forms>

What is the difference between an absentee and a mail ballot in PA?

In accordance with the PA Constitution and Election Code, absentee ballots require voters to be out of their municipality or unable to go to the polls because of illness or physical disability. “No excuse” mail ballots were permitted by Act 77 of 2019 and ruling by the PA Supreme Court for which any registered voter is eligible to request a mail ballot for any reason. Absentee and mail ballots (now together called “mail-in ballots”) both require the voter to apply and are processed exactly the same way.

What is the deadline to apply for and return a mail-in ballot?

The deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot is by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday preceding the Election or one week before Election Day. The date and time by which it must be received by the Board of Elections (BOE) is no later than 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Why do some voters receive one or more applications for mail-in ballots?

Third party organizations not officially affiliated with any government entity use voter lists to send applications to voters in the hope of getting them to vote by mail. They are NOT ballots. If voters complete and send in multiple mail-in ballot requests, they will only receive one ballot. The first application will be processed and all subsequent ones will be denied as duplicates.

Why do some voters receive an email saying their mail-in ballot application was denied as a duplicate?

Voters who selected to be on the mail-in ballot list and provided their email address in the application, or who have already applied for a mail-in ballot, will receive a duplicate error if they try to reapply. Voters often forget, or are not aware, that they checked the box to receive mail-in ballots for both elections during the year (Primary in the spring and General in the fall) when they applied for a mail-in ballot early in the year.

If a voter is temporarily living at a different address, may the voter have the mail-in ballot sent to that address?

Yes, the mail-in ballot application includes the option for an alternate address.

When a voter that applied for a mail-in ballot checks the status of the ballot application online, why does it say “pending”?

Application status is pending until the ballot is available and prepared for mailing.

When can voters that applied for a mail-in ballot expect to receive a ballot?

Ballots are mailed once they are produced and ready for mailing by the Board of Elections, about 30 to 40 days prior to the date of the election. It is advisable to send the ballot back as soon as possible after receiving it, and to hand deliver it to the Board of Elections if not mailed at least 7 days before Election Day.

What is the purpose of QR Code on the ballot and envelope?

The 2D bar codes, also known as QR codes, on ballots allow the County Board of Elections vendor’s automated quality control process to ensure that the correct ballot is being mailed to the correct voter. The barcode on the return (outer) envelope is used to identify if a ballot has been received by the BOE. The QR codes provide an automated way for equipment to read what is already printed in human readable form, they do not tie a ballot to a voter.

How can I ensure my ballot will be counted?

All ballots must be returned to the Board of Elections office no later than 8:00 PM on Election Day. In accordance with Act 77 and with a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling, mail-in ballot must be that is not enclosed in the secrecy envelope must be disqualified.

What are the options for returning a mail-in ballot other than through the U.S. mail?

- A. Voters may bring their own ballot to the County Election Office at 150 N. Queen Street, Suite 117 in Lancaster, 17603 (Chestnut Street entrance) up to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. The Election Office is open during county business hours of 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday and extended hours a few days before Election Day (watch for specific hours). In accordance with the PA Election Code, ballots from anyone other than the voter delivering the ballot cannot and will not be accepted (unless accompanied by a properly completed Designated Agent form...see below for more details.) Please be aware that returning mail ballots other than the voter's own ballot is a violation of state law which can result in legal action.
- B. On Election Day, voters may surrender their mail-in ballot and return envelope to the Judge of Election at their polling place and then vote in person. If voters do not have all of these materials and desire to vote in person, they may vote provisionally. This is to ensure that their mail-in ballot was not already received by the Board of Elections to be counted.

What if voters are not able to physically apply for and/or return their own mail-in ballot before Election Day?

In accordance with the Election Code, voters with a disability preventing them from completing the mail-in ballot application and/or returning their ballot are required to complete the "*Authorize a Designated Agent to Help You Obtain and/or Return Your Mail-In or Absentee Ballot*" form. This form and others are available online (see link below).

What if a voter is no longer able to vote in person after the deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot has passed?

In accordance with the Election Code, voters with a sudden illness, disability, unforeseen business/occupational duty or other activity that occurs after the deadline to request a mail-in ballot that will have the voter out of their municipality on Election Day can complete and return the "Pennsylvania Application for Emergency Absentee Ballot" form. If voters are not able to pick up and/or return the Emergency Absentee Ballot Application, they must complete the "Authorize a Representative to Pick up and/or Return Emergency Absentee Ballot" form. These forms and others are available online (see link below).

What if a voter that mailed the mail-in ballot does not receive an email or checks the Commonwealth's voter database (called SURE) and it does not acknowledge receipt of the mailed ballot?

Voters should stop in or call the BOE office to check to make sure that the ballot was not received. If it was not received, the original mail ballot will be cancelled, and a replacement ballot will be issued. Voters can also go to their poll on Election Day and cast a provisional ballot

Can voters vote early in PA?

Yes, essentially, when mail-in ballots are ready (as announced by the County BOE), registered voters are able to go to the BOE Office apply for, complete and return their ballot all in one visit. The deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot is 7 Days before the Election.

What happens once a voter mails or delivers their mail-in ballot to the Lancaster County Board of Elections?

Once the mail ballot is received, elections workers at the Board of Elections scan the barcode on the outer envelope of all received mail-in ballots to acknowledge receipt. The scanned code is also recorded in the Commonwealth's voter database (called SURE). This is how voters can check to see if their ballot was received. The mail-in ballots are then sorted by election district and locked in a secure "vault" at the County until Election Day, when they are counted.