

Absentee Ballot Processing

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Issue

Describe the (1) process for submitting, receiving, and counting absentee ballots and (2) temporary measures implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

State law establishes procedural requirements for processing absentee ballots. First, town clerks must accept ballots delivered in-person or by mail or picked up from dedicated drop boxes. The clerks note receipt of each ballot and sort them by voting district. Once sorted, the registrars of voters (1) take receipt of the ballots at specific times prescribed by statute and (2) check the absentee ballots received against the official voting checklist, noting the receipt of an elector's absentee ballot on the checklist. After the polls close, each ballot is evaluated for legal compliance. If the ballot is not compliant, the registrar must reject the ballot and note the reason for rejection on it. Once all invalid ballots are removed, designated ballot counters count the remaining ballots.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several temporary measures were implemented to extend deadlines and provide flexibility for processing absentee ballots.

Absentee Ballots Submission

By law, absentee ballot packages consist of an outer envelope containing information about the elector (e.g., name and address) and an inner envelope containing the elector's marked ballot with a statement signed by the elector under penalty of false statement in absentee balloting. Once the elector has filled out the ballot, he or she must insert the ballot into the inner envelope, seal it

inside, and then insert the inner envelope into the outer one ([CGS § 9-140a](#)). By law, town clerks must accept completed absentee ballots by mail or in-person ([CGS § 9-140b](#)).

Beginning with the 2020 general election, the law requires clerks to establish secured drop boxes that electors can use to return their completed ballots for a state or municipal election, primary, or referendum. By law, dropping off a ballot at a drop box is considered “mailing” the ballot. The clerks must collect the ballots (generally each weekday after issuing the ballots until the polls close) and process them as other absentee ballots. The legislature made the use of these drop boxes permanent in 2021 ([CGS § 9-140b\(c\)](#)), as amended by [PA 21-2](#), June Special Session (JSS), § 102).

Receipt by Town Clerk

When the clerk receives a completed ballot, he or she must endorse it with his or her signature and the date and time of receipt without opening the outer envelope. The clerk must keep a list of applicants who return absentee ballots. Additionally, the clerk must execute an affidavit attesting to the accuracy of the endorsement, which must accompany the ballots throughout the process ([CGS § 9-140c\(a\)](#)).

Delivery to Registrars of Voters

Ballots Received by 11 a.m. on Day Before Election Day

Beginning the seventh day before the election and until the last weekday before the election, the clerk must sort the ballots into voting districts and provide them to the registrars of voters to check the names on the ballot envelopes against the official checklist used in the election. If the registrars find a match, they mark “absentee” or “A” next to the elector’s name. If not, then they must write “rejected” on the outer envelope along with the reason(s) for rejection ([CGS § 9-140c\(b\) & \(c\)](#)).

Once the checking is complete, the registrars return the unopened ballots to the clerk, who must seal and keep them until the election. The clerk follows this procedure for all ballots received by 11 a.m. on the weekday before the election. On election, the clerk must deliver these ballots to the registrars between 10 a.m. and noon, or if after noon, at a mutually agreeable time no later than 8 p.m. The ballots must be counted at a single time as designated by the registrars ([CGS § 9-140c\(b\), \(d\)-\(e\), & \(h\)](#)). The clerk and the registrar must execute an affidavit of delivery and receipt of the absentee ballots each time, stating the number of ballots delivered ([CGS § 9-140c\(j\)](#)).

Ballots Received After 11 a.m. and on Election Day

For ballots received after 11 a.m. on the day before the election until the close of the polls on election day (i.e., 8 p.m.), the clerk must sort these ballots into voting districts and keep them separate. The clerk must deliver them to the registrars (1) at 6 p.m. on election day, if requested by the registrars (or at a mutually agreeable time between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.), and (2) at the close of the polls (for any remaining undelivered ballots)([CGS § 9-140c\(f\)-\(h\)](#)). As with the ballots received by 11 a.m., the clerk and the registrars must execute an affidavit of delivery and receipt of the absentee ballots received after 11 a.m., stating the number of ballots delivered ([CGS § 9-140c\(i\)](#)).

Counting of Absentee Ballots

By law, absentee ballots are counted at a central counting location unless the registrars of voters agree they should be counted at the respective polling place ([CGS § 9-147a](#)). Each registrar of voters must appoint one or more electors to count absentee ballots. If counting occurs at a central location, the registrars also appoint a central counting moderator and an alternate moderator ([CGS § 9-147c](#)).

Before counting these ballots in a polling place, the absentee ballot counters must check the names against the official checklist used at the polling place to ensure that the individual has not already voted in person. If counting occurs at a central location and the polls have not closed, the names must be called into the appropriate polling place to be checked against the polling place's official checklists. If the polls are closed and counting is being conducted at a central location, then the absentee ballot counters must wait for the official polling place checklists to be delivered to the central counting moderator ([CGS § 9-140c\(i\)](#)).

In either scenario, if the individual is marked on the official checklist as having voted in person, then the absentee ballot counters must write "rejected" on the outer envelope along with the reason for rejection and cannot open the envelope or count the ballot ([CGS § 9-140c\(i\)](#)).

Once an applicant's name has been checked (whether before or on election day) and verified as not having already voted, the absentee ballot counters must open the outer envelope and verify that the applicant signed the inner envelope. If the applicant signed it and submitted the required identifying information, the counter removes the ballot from the envelope, still folded, and places it

Pilot Program for Verifying Signatures

In 2021, the General Assembly required the secretary of the state to establish a pilot program to manually or electronically verify signatures on returned absentee ballots' inner envelopes for the 2022 state election. By January 1, 2023, the secretary must submit the findings and recommendations for legislation to the Government Administration and Elections Committee (PA 21-2, JSS, § 144).

to be counted. Once all ballots have been verified, they are shuffled together (to protect elector privacy) and then counted ([CGS § 9-150a](#)).

After the counting is complete, the polling place moderator must deliver the official checklist and return it to the head moderator. If the count is conducted at a central location, then the central counting moderator must deliver the official checklists, duplicate checklist, and returns to the head moderator ([CGS § 9-140c\(i\)](#)).

For more detail on this process, or for uncommon issues that may arise, the secretary of the state has also published a [procedure manual for counting absentee ballots](#), as required by law ([CGS § 9-150a\(h\)](#)).

COVID-19 Exceptions

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislature implemented temporary measures for receiving and processing absentee ballots for the state election in 2020 and any election held on or after June 23, 2021, but before November 3, 2021.

First, the legislature authorized town clerks to sort absentee ballots fourteen days before the election, rather than the seven days authorized under existing law. Once these ballots were sorted, beginning four days before the election, they could be delivered to the registrars of voters at 5 p.m. that day, or before 6 a.m. on election day. The law also required a current checklist to be delivered with the ballots each day ([CGS § 9-140c](#), as amended by PA 20-3, JSS, § 6, & PA 20-4, SSS, § 2).

Additionally, the legislature authorized registrars of voters to process absentee ballots before the election at a central location ([CGS § 9-147a](#), as amended by PA 20-4, SSS, § 3). To pre-count ballots, registrars were required to process ballots by:

1. removing the inner envelopes from the outer envelopes,
2. reporting to the moderator the total number of absentee ballots received and the total number of presidential and overseas ballots received, and
3. rejecting ballots for which the inner envelope statement is improperly executed.

Once processed, the ballots must be secured, as directed by the secretary of the state, until counting begins on election day (PA 20-4, SSS, § 5, codified as [CGS § 9-150e](#)).

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