



Wisconsin Elections Commission

201 West Washington Avenue | Second Floor | P.O. Box 7984 | Madison, WI 53707-7984
(608) 266-8005 | elections@wi.gov | elections.wi.gov

DATE: July 17, 2026

TO: Wisconsin Municipal Clerks
Wisconsin County Clerks
City of Milwaukee Election Commission
Milwaukee County Election Commission

FROM: The Wisconsin Elections Commission

SUBJECT: Absentee Ballot Return Best Practices

1. Summary

On July 9, 2026, the Commission unanimously approved the publication of guidance for voters to help them understand when, where, and how to return an absentee ballot. The attached guidance will be made available to media and posted on the Commission website. Clerks may wish to use the guidance in their own materials for voters or to help train staff. No action is required of clerks.

2. Questions

Questions regarding the attached absentee ballot return guidance can be directed to elections@wi.gov or 608-261-2028.

Wisconsin Elections Commissioners

Don M. Millis, chair | Marge Bostelmann | Ann S. Jacobs | Carrie Riepl | Robert Spindell | Mark L. Thomsen

Administrator
Meagan Wolfe

Absentee Ballot Return : Best Practices

Introduction

In Wisconsin, any voter can choose to cast their ballot one of three ways:

- a. At their polling location on Election Day
- b. Absentee ballot returned: (1) by mail, (2) by delivery to a clerk's office, or (3) depositing in a drop box
- c. In-person absentee ballot (sometimes called early voting) at an officially designated site beginning two weeks before Election Day

1. Voting Absentee

Do I need a reason to vote absentee?

No, you **do not** need a reason or excuse to vote by absentee ballot in Wisconsin. Any Wisconsin voter who wishes to vote absentee may do so by submitting a request as described below.

How do I vote absentee?

There are three ways to request an absentee ballot.

1. **Online.** In just a few simple steps, you can officially [request your absentee ballot](#) online at MyVote.wi.gov, which will generate an email notification to your municipal clerk.
2. **By Mail.** If you are a registered Wisconsin voter, you can download the [Application For Absentee Ballot](#). Then, fill out the form and mail it to [your municipal clerk's office](#). With few exceptions (e.g., you are indefinitely confined, live permanently overseas), you *must also* include a copy of your acceptable photo ID with your absentee ballot request. Information on the Photo ID needed to vote in Wisconsin is available at [BringIt.wi.gov](#).
3. **By Email or Fax.** You can also request an absentee ballot by carefully composing and sending an email or fax to [your municipal clerk](#) that includes:
 - Your full name;
 - Voting address;

- Mailing address;
- The election in which you are voting;
- A copy of your photo ID (if you have not provided it with a previous absentee ballot request).

Your clerk must receive your absentee ballot request no later than 5 p.m. on the Thursday before Election Day. However, we recommend making this request as soon as possible, so you have time to receive, complete, and return your ballot to be counted.

Note: Before your clerk can send you an absentee ballot, you must be registered to vote. Find out if you're registered at MyVote.WI.gov. Select "Register to vote," and enter your name and date of birth.

2. Returning an Absentee Ballot

There are three ways to return your absentee ballot:

- By Mail
- Using a drop box
- Directly to your clerk's office

When should I return my completed absentee ballot by mail?

Mail transit times vary. Do not delay returning your completed absentee ballot. If a mailed ballot arrives after 8 p.m. on Election Day, it will not be counted.¹

The Wisconsin Elections Commission recommends putting your ballot in the mail **at least** 10 days before Election Day to ensure it is received in time. Voters who are out-of-state may need more time to ensure timely return. If you return your absentee ballot through the mail the week before Election Day, there is a significant risk that your ballot may not be received and counted.

Your returned ballot must be sent to your city, village, or town clerk. This means:

- Do not mail or deliver the ballot to your county clerk.

¹ In Wisconsin, it **does not matter** when your ballot is postmarked. Some other states use the postmark to determine if a ballot can be counted. Wisconsin does not use the postmark. In Wisconsin, absentee ballots must arrive before polls close on Election Day to be counted.

- Do not mail or deliver the ballot to the Wisconsin Elections Commission.
- Do not mail or deliver the ballot to the Wisconsin Secretary of State.
- Do not mail or deliver the ballot to the courthouse. The clerk of court is not your municipal clerk.

Concerned your ballot will not arrive on-time through the mail?

You can also hand-deliver your absentee ballot directly to your municipal clerk. On Election Day, you may hand-deliver your absentee ballot to your polling place or central counting facility (if applicable).² Or, if your clerk has established drop boxes for absentee ballot return, you may return the ballot using a drop box.

NOTE: You cannot return someone else's ballot unless you are assisting a voter with a disability.

When should I return my completed absentee ballot by drop box?

When a drop box is available for use is determined by each municipality. Some municipalities allow the drop boxes to be used on Election Day and some do not. Those available on Election Day usually have a time cut-off after which the drop box cannot be used. It is recommended that a voter only use a drop box prior to Election Day. If on Election Day, contact your clerk to determine if a drop box is available.

When should I return my completed absentee ballot directly to my clerk?

You may return your absentee ballot directly to your clerk prior to Election Day. If you are concerned your absentee ballot will not arrive by Election Day, you must deliver your absentee ballot to your clerk. On Election Day, you must return your ballot to your polling place or central counting facility (if applicable).²

² Most Wisconsin cities, villages, and towns count absentee ballots at the polling place. Some jurisdictions (mostly larger cities) count absentee ballots at a central counting facility. Contact [**your municipal clerk**](#) to determine where your ballot will be counted.

3. Checking on Your Ballot

Has my ballot arrived on time?

First, check your absentee ballot status online at MyVote.wi.gov by selecting "[Track My Ballot](#)". If the website does not show your ballot returned, you can also call your [municipal clerk](#).

If I received an absentee ballot, but did not return it, can I still vote at the polls on Election Day?

Yes. As long as you do not return your absentee ballot, you can still vote at the polls. Once an absentee ballot has been returned to the municipal clerk, it cannot be spoiled and reissued for any reason.

If I returned my completed ballot in the mail, can I change my mind and vote in person on Election Day?

No.

If you return your ballot in the mail, you cannot vote in person on Election Day, even if the absentee ballot has not arrived.

What if I am a military or overseas voter?

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) provides detailed recommendations for absent military and overseas voters.

- Military voters at sea or at overseas facilities without access to the military postal system should return their ballot at least 35 calendar days before the election.
- Military voters with access to the military postal system and civilian voters overseas should return their ballot at least 30 calendar days before the election.
- Stateside (CONUS) military voters and eligible family members should return their ballot at least 11 calendar days before the election.

In all cases, FVAP recommends that military and overseas voters complete and return the ballot as soon as it is received.