Guidance on
Managing Accessible Remote Absentee and Mail-In Voting
for Voters with Disabilities

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# Managing Accessible Remote Absentee and Mail-In Voting for Voters with Disabilities

## Scope:

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## 1   BACKGROUND

Voters with disabilities can mark their absentee or mail-in ballot remotely to provide a legally required accessible means to cast their ballot. The capability for marking the ballot will be provided using a product from Democracy Live. The process will provide a mechanism for the voter to request and gain access to a remote ballot along with the required affirmations. The voter will mark the ballot electronically, print the ballot, and use the special envelopes mailed to them from the county board of elections to return the voted ballot. The voted absentee or mail-in ballot can be returned to the county board of elections by mail or delivered in person to the county election board office or another secure location designated by the board of.

## 2   ACCESSIBLE REMOTE ABSENTEE AND MAIL-IN VOTING

### 2.1   ACCESSIBLE REMOTE BALLOT REQUEST

A qualified voter with a disability who applies for an absentee or mail-in ballot by the statutory deadline and who has not already submitted a voted ballot is eligible to request a remote ballot through the Accessible Remote Ballot Marking System. The steps are as follows:

- A registered voter submits an absentee or mail-in ballot application via any of the methods to apply for an absentee or mail-in ballot.
- The voter then submits an accessible web-based request for the Remote Ballot, which is available on the Department of State (DOS) website. The voter can also complete the accessible PDF application, which is also available on the DOS website and either mail it to their county board of elections or email it to ra-awib@pa.gov. The voter provides name, date of birth, address where registered to vote, mailing address, phone number, and the email address where the remote ballot will be delivered. The web-based request form also includes an attestation declaring that the voter is eligible to use the accessible remote ballot. Voters are instructed to submit this web-based application simultaneously with the absentee or mail-in ballot application or within 24 hours of submitting the ballot application.
- Once the voter submits the web-based application for the Remote Ballot, the voter receives an email acknowledging receipt. Additionally, an email is automatically transmitted to both the county board of elections where the voter is registered and to a DOS resource account indicating that the voter has requested a Remote Ballot.

  The email message will have the following information:

  - Sender: " no-reply@pa.egov.com"
  - Subject: "Voter First Name" "Voter Last Name" "County where the voter is registered"
  - Body of email: The information the voter submitted on the request form, including first name, last name, date of birth, voter's registered address and mail-in address, email and phone number.

- Any DOS staff or county board of elections staff who interacts with an eligible voter should be trained to convey information about the accessible remote ballot solution and how to request access to the accessible remote ballot.

## 2.2   PREPARING THE REMOTE BALLOT

- County staff must work with DOS and Democracy Live as soon as ballots are finalized to upload the following to the Democracy Live portal:
  - ➢ Ballot definition files;
  - ➢ Affirmation language; and
  - ➢ Any special instructions provided to voters on assembling the return ballot.

- Democracy Live will convert all ballot styles to accessible ballots and send converted ballots for quality assurance (QA) and testing to counties.
  - ➢ Counties will then convert the ballots as described in the QA process and approve them for use to be available for voters. The county will work with Democracy Live representatives if ballot changes are required.

## 2.3   ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION AND BALLOT MAILING

- **The County board of elections, upon receipt of the request for an accessible remote ballot, should** look up the voter's record in the SURE Portal to confirm that the voter applied for an absentee or mail-in ballot by the statutory deadline and has not submitted a voted ballot. After confirming the voter's eligibility, the county staff member should send an email to the voter (with a copy to DOS at ra-awib@pa.gov) confirming receipt of the voter's request and informing the eligible voter that the request is being processed. If the county board of elections requires additional information to process the remote ballot request, or if the applicant has not submitted sufficient information for the county board of elections to match them with the voter record, the board should contact the voter to gather the necessary information.

- If the **county board of elections** determines that the voter is eligible to receive an accessible remote ballot:

  - ➢ The county board of elections shall complete the QA process of the required ballot style on the Democracy Live portal.
  - ➢ The county board of elections shall prepare a ballot envelope packet for the voter and mail it via **first class mail**. The packet will include special envelopes, including a return envelope for use with Remote Ballots, that DOS is procuring and delivering directly to counties. The packet mailed to the voter contains:
    - ▪ *Outgoing envelope*. This is the outermost envelope that contains the balloting materials sent to the mail voter. The outermost envelope should be titled with "Official Election Ballot."
    - ▪ *Ballot-return envelope*. This is the special ballot return envelope that has been designed for use with accessible remote ballots. These envelopes are made with textured paper, and the voter will use this envelope to return their ballot. The ballot-return envelope has a declaration on the back that must be signed and dated by the voter. A voter with a disability using the Remote Ballot solution can sign and date anywhere on the envelope. If a voter is unable to sign and date the declaration because of an illness or physical disability, another adult person may assist the voter with placing a mark beneath the declaration statement and shall also provide their signature and address as the voter's witness. The county board of elections should also affix the mailing label with the correspondence ID on this envelope.
    - ▪ *Ballot secrecy envelope or "official ballot envelope".* This is the smaller envelope in which the voter places their voted ballot.
    - ▪ *Special notice*. This is included if ID is required, along with an envelope for the voter to return a photocopy of acceptable ID.

  - ➢ The county board of elections must prepare the ballot envelope packet in a timely manner to ensure that the voter has the envelopes when they receive the accessible remote ballot link. The timely mailing of the envelopes is an important part of the process and the county board of elections must ensure that appropriate training is provided to all staff involved in this process.

- A county election official and DOS will prepare or update the required voter data file, including any additional authentication information, for Democracy Live, and will enter this information in the Democracy Live system via their portal.
- Once the ballot preparation, data entry and QA are complete, the county sends the link for the statewide portal and instructions to the voter's email address so they can access and mark their ballot electronically. The email will include all required instructions for voting.

# 3 MARKING THE BALLOT AND MAILING THE BALLOT TO COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

## 3.1 MARKING THE BALLOT

- Eligible voters will receive an email with the secure statewide portal link.
- When voters click on the secure link, they are presented with a self-authentication page.
  - The initial page displays the voter's first name, last name and date of birth (DOB), and a drop down to select the voter's county.
    - Matching the voter requires a match of the following fields:
      - County
      - First Name
      - Last Name
      - DOB

  - If the voter is found in the voter data file that the county and DOS uploaded to the Democracy Live system, and is eligible to receive an accessible Remote Ballot, the voter is presented with a secure page where they enter additional authentication information.
    - Additional authentication information will include a ballot access code assigned by DOS and the county board of elections.

- If the voter is authenticated, they are presented with an affirmation page and can access their balloting materials.
  - The initial page display shows the affirmation the voter must confirm that they are eligible to use the system.
  - After the attestation, the voter is presented with the ballot for their voting district to mark.
  - The voter then marks the ballot following the guided process, and when they are done, are instructed to print and assemble the packet.

## 3.2 PRINTING AND SUBMITTING THE BALLOT TO THE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

- The voter confirms her selections and prints the ballot.
- The voter then assembles the packet using the special envelopes received from the county board of elections and returns it by mail or delivers it in person to the county election board office or another secure location designated by the board. The instructions on the Remote Ballot Marking System indicate to the voter that the declaration appears on the side of the return envelope with the flap; however, the county board of elections should honor a signature and date anywhere on the return #11 envelope. The voter instructions also include steps to identify the secrecy envelope and return envelope.

# 4 COUNTY PROCESSES UPON RECEIPT OF VOTED BALLOT

## 4.1 RECORDING BALLOTS FROM REMOTE BALLOT MARKING SYSTEM

- County boards of elections shall record returned ballots in the SURE system with the correct return date. To record a ballot as returned, the staff should scan the correspondence ID barcode on the outside of the envelope. The correspondence ID on the envelope is unique to each absentee or mail-in voter and each issuance of a ballot to a voter. For additional information about examination of the ballot envelope refer to the DOS guidance.
- Special attention must be paid to check for a signature and date **anywhere on the outer return envelope**. Voters with disabilities, especially those who are blind, may have limited capacity to sign in a specific location on the envelope and a signature and date anywhere on the envelope should be honored.
- Should a county board of elections ever receive both a completed pre-printed ballot from a voter and a ballot marked using the accessible remote ballot solution from the same voter, the ballot from the accessible remote ballot solution should be considered the voter's official ballot and the pre-printed ballot should be voided and not counted.
- Aside from the signature and date being permitted anywhere on the outer envelope, these ballots shall follow the regular absentee and mail-in ballot rules and procedures for storage, reconciliation, pre-canvass and canvass procedures followed by county boards of elections.

## 4.2 TABULATING BALLOTS MARKED ON THE REMOTE BALLOT MARKING SYSTEM

County boards of elections should have processes in place to canvass and tabulate ballots marked using the accessible remote ballot marking system following their regular absentee and mail-in ballot tabulation procedures. A complete reconciliation of these ballots must be performed to ensure that every ballot is canvassed and tabulated. County boards of elections must consider the secrecy of the voted ballot and voting system capabilities when finalizing the tabulation process for ballots marked on the remote ballot marking system. .

Version History:

| Version | Date | Description | Author |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 9.23.20 | Initial document release | Bureau of Election Security and Technology |
| 1.1 | 4.29.21 | Update for 2021 Primary Election | Bureau of Election Security and Technology |