



VOTING IN NEW YORK STATE For People with Developmental Disabilities

1. Why is it important to vote?

Voting is one of the primary ways that Americans exercise their rights as citizens. Each vote counts. Your vote Matters!

2. Who is eligible to vote?

To qualify to register to vote, one must:

- Be a United States citizen
- Be at least 18* years old
- Be a resident of this state and the county, city or village where registering, for at least 30 days before the election
- Not be judged mentally incompetent by a court
- Not be in prison or on parole for a felony conviction
- Not claim the right to vote elsewhere

** Effective January 2020, citizens who are 16 and 17 years old can **pre-register** to vote. Although you must be 18 years old before you can vote in an election, the county where you pre-registered will process your application and it will become active when you vote at the legal age of 18.*

3. How can I register to vote?

Below are several ways you can register to vote:

- You can register in-person at your [county board of elections \(CBOE\)](#) or at a [New York State Agency Based Voter Registration Center](#)
- You may also get a voter application form at the Department of Motor Vehicles or on their website at (<https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/electronic-voter-registration-application>) or at (<https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/electronic-voter-registration-application>), if you already have DMV-issued identification.
- You can register to vote by calling 1-800-FOR-VOTE
- You can fill out a Voter Registration Form, sign, date and mail to your county board of elections (see item #25).

4. When I register, do I have to join a political party?

No. You can choose not to join a political party.

5. What are the political parties?

In New York State, the eight recognized parties are: the Democratic, Republican, Conservative, Working Families, Green, Libertarian, Independence, and Serve America Movement (SAM).

6. Do I have to be a member of a political party to vote in an election?

You do not have to be a member of a political party to vote in the General Election. However, in NYS you do have to be a member of a political party to vote in the Primary Election.

7. What is the difference between a Primary election and General election?

The Primary election happens before the general election. In a Primary election, you are voting for the candidate(s) you want to represent your political party in the General election. The candidate of each party who wins in the Primary election, moves on to the General election in November. Candidates who win the General election will hold the office.

8. Can I vote without going to the polls?

Yes. If you are a registered voter, you may be able to vote without going to the polls using an absentee ballot. An absentee ballot allows you to vote by mail.

9. How do I vote using an absentee ballot?

You can vote by absentee ballot if you are:

- Absent from the county in which you are registered to vote; or, if you are a resident of New York City who will be absent from said city on Election Day
- Unable to appear at your polling station on Election Day due to a temporary or permanent illness or disability; or, because you are the primary caregiver of one or more individuals who are ill or physically disabled
- A resident or patient of a Veterans Health Administration Hospital
- Detained in jail awaiting Grand Jury action or confined in prison after conviction for an offense, other than a felony, and you meet other qualifications

10. How can I get an absentee ballot?

To download a copy of the NYS absentee ballot application, or get more information about voting by absentee ballot, visit the NYS Board of Elections website at: Your absentee ballot application must be received by mail at least 7 days before the date of the election or delivered in person to the appropriate CBOE office at least one day before the election.

11. What if I have moved since I last voted?

If you have moved since the last time you voted, you must re-register to vote. The Voter Registration Form should be used as a change of address form for voting purposes only. Complete the form with your new residential information and mail it to your CBOE.

12. Who should I vote for?

When you vote, you are helping choose the people who you think will best represent you. It is important for you to vote for a candidate who believes in the things you think are important. Choosing which candidate to vote for is 100% your decision. It is nobody's choice but yours.

13. Can I still vote if I don't know all the candidates and what they stand for?

Yes, you can. It is difficult to know every issue that a candidate is supporting. If you want to know more about a candidate or what issues you are voting about, you can get more information.

14. Where can I find information on the various candidates?

Below are some ways to find information on candidates:

- **Television, newspapers and magazines and Print Media** - Before an election, media outlets will often dedicate segments/articles to campaign and election matters. These can be excellent resources to learn where candidates stand on various issues

- **Talk to the Candidates** – Many candidates have local offices where you can obtain more information. Candidates often have office hours so they can speak to people in their community about shared concerns
- **Public Forums** – Candidates also have public forums you can attend to hear their ideas and ask them questions.
- **Candidate Websites** - Most candidates have their own internet website that can be found through a quick name search online.
- **The League of Women’s Voters of New York State** (<https://my.lwv.org/new-york-state>). This website has information on all candidates running for office and other resources for voters. The LWV of NYS is a non-partisan group, meaning that it does not support or choose one candidate over another.
- **The Independent Living Centers (ILCs)**. ILCs can tell you how to contact various candidates so that you can ask them questions. The ILCs usually put together forums where people with and/or without disabilities can ask candidates questions about the issues that are important to them. This may also help you decide who you want to vote for.

15. What if I don’t like any of the candidates and I want to vote for someone else?

When you vote, you are selecting a person/people who you think will best represent you. If you prefer not to vote for a candidate on the ballot, you can choose not to vote, or you can choose to write in the name of a person who you think is a better candidate.

16. Can I change my political party?

Yes. You can use the voter registration form to change your party enrollment from one political party to another. You can also use this form to join a political party for the first time, or to make address changes, as noted in item #11. Forms asking for political party changes must be received by February 14 each year to be immediately effective for that voting year. Contact your CBOE if you want to make a change to your political party after February 15.

17. After I vote, if someone asks me who I voted for, do I have to tell them?

No. Who you vote for is a personal decision. You do not have to share this information with anyone else.

18. Can my guardian keep me from voting?

If you have questions regarding how your guardianship affects your right to vote, contact your Care Manager for assistance. They can check into your situation to help you understand voting rights. Your guardian cannot vote for you.

19. Can I vote by myself?

Yes, you have the right to vote independently and privately by marking a paper ballot, or using a Ballot Marking Device (BMD), if you need assistance marking your ballot.

20. What is a Ballot Marking Device (BMD)?

A BMD is a device that helps people with disabilities mark their ballot independently and privately. Each voting site also has access to a variety of accessibility assistive devices that may assist you to mark your ballot and cast your vote independently. These devices may include a Sip-N-Puff, Two-Switch Paddle, or Audio-Tactile Interface. Contact your CBOE for more information on voting accessibility devices.

21. What if I need help using the BMD?

Every polling site is required to have a BMD in working order. Poll staff are trained and must be prepared to assist all voters requesting to use the BMD, regardless of your disability.

22. Can I bring someone with me to help me to vote?

Yes, you have the right to bring someone with you to help you vote. However, the person may not be your employer, your union representative, or any candidate who is on the ballot seeking election.

Anyone who assists you to vote must follow your directions and vote for the candidates you choose. If you have any questions about who can assist you to vote, call your local CBOE.

23. What should I do if I have problems when I go to vote?

You can call the Election Protection Hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE, or contact Disability Rights New York at: <https://www.drny.org/page/pa-for-voting-access-pava-26.html>, (518)432-7861 (voice), (518)512-3448 (TTY), (800) 993-8982 (Toll Free). You also have the right to file a complaint with the New York State Board of Elections.

24. Does New York have Early Voting?

Yes. New York State passed a law in 2019 that now requires all counties to provide registered voters with nine additional days to cast their vote, in person, prior to each scheduled primary and general election day.

Contact your local CBOE at <https://www.voteearlyny.org> to find the dates and locations of early voting sites.

25. Where can I get additional information about voting?

Your Care Manager is a good resource for questions about voting. Information can also be found on the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities website at www.opwdd.ny.gov/access-supports/know-your-rights. You can also contact Disability Rights New York by email at Voting@DRNY.org, by calling 518-432-7861 (voice), 518-512-3448 (TTY), 800-993-8982 (Toll Free) or by visiting their website at www.DRNY.org

26. Where can I find the New York voter registration form?

You can complete a PDF version of the New York State Voter Registration Form on-line by clicking on the link below or you can print the form to complete by hand.

- [Complete English Form On-line \(📄 304KB\)](#)
- [Complete Spanish Form On-Line \(📄 310KB\)](#)

You can also complete an Accessible version of the New York State Voter Registration Form on-line by clicking on the link below, typing the necessary information and selecting the appropriate boxes.

- [Accessible English Form On-line](#)
- [Accessible Spanish Form On-Line](#)

Once the form is completed, you need to print the form and sign and date it. Then, mail the form to your [county board of elections](#).