



Student Voting Guide for Massachusetts

Registration Deadlines and Election Dates

Primary Election Registration Deadline: Aug. 17, 2012

Primary Election: September 6, 2012

General Election Registration Deadline: October 17, 2012

General Election: November 6, 2012

Registering to vote at a home residence:

Some students may choose to register or remain registered at their home (prior/parents') address if they intend to return there after college. In this case a student may need to vote by absentee ballot. Students are not permitted to both maintain their Massachusetts registration to vote and also register to vote in another state.

Where to vote

Polling place locator online at <http://www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.aspx>.

Voters must cast their ballots in the correct precinct. Sometimes there are multiple precincts in one polling place, so confirm your precinct ahead of time and get in the correct line!

Register at School or Home?

Registering to vote at a school residence:

Students are free to establish residency in Massachusetts for voting purposes if they regard Massachusetts as their home and have no intention of moving elsewhere even if they are classified as "out of state" by their college or university.. Future events that may lead to leaving the area do not prevent you from having a present intent to remain in Massachusetts.

Voting in Massachusetts may be considered a declaration of residency, and may subject you to other laws that govern state residents. Registering to vote in Massachusetts makes you a resident for the purposes of your driver's license and vehicle registration. If you drive your vehicle in Massachusetts, you have 30 days from when you register to vote to register your vehicle and get a Massachusetts driver's license.

Voting By Absentee Ballot

If you are a registered voter in Massachusetts but will be away from your residence because you are attending an institution of higher education, or any other reason, you may vote using an absentee ballot from the city or town in which you are registered in Massachusetts. Absentee ballot applications are available on the website of the Secretary of State. You may submit an application for an absentee ballot as late as noon the day before the election, but it is best to submit the application as soon as practicable. There is also an "Absentee Ballot Application by a Family Member" that a relative can use to request a ballot for you. You may mail or hand-deliver it back to your local election office but it must arrive before noon the day before Election Day.

Your voted absentee ballot must be received before the polls close on Election Day, but you cannot deliver an absentee ballot directly to the polling place on Election Day. If you know you are going to be away from your residence on Election Day, you may wish to call your local election office approximately two or three weeks and ask if you can make your application and cast your vote in a single visit. In certain circumstances, after your absentee ballot application is processed, Massachusetts may mail you a ballot for every election in which you are eligible to vote during the calendar year.

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A Project of the Fair Elections Legal Network

Out-of-state students who are considering voting absentee in their home state outside of Massachusetts should first determine absentee requirements for their state. Some states do not allow voting by mail for first-time voters. Also, some states require copies of identification be mailed with an absentee ballot. Out-of-state students should determine if they want to vote absentee in another state or register in Massachusetts before the Massachusetts registration deadline.

ID Requirements & Student IDs

If you registered to vote by mail or after January 1, 2003, you will be required to show identification when you vote for the first time in a federal election. Alternatively, you can send in a copy of your identification, e.g., your Massachusetts driver's license number or the final four digits of your social security number with your voter registration form.

First-time voters should bring some type of ID with them, although it need not be a photo ID. Acceptable forms of ID include:

- a Massachusetts driver's license or state ID card;
- a utility bill;
- a bank statement;
- a government-issued check; a paycheck; or
- any other government document bearing the voter's name and address.

The address is critical! If your student ID does not bear your local address, an alternative form of identification must be provided. If you cannot show ID, you may cast

a provisional ballot, which will be counted if you are determined to be an eligible voter who voted in the correct precinct.

First Time Voters

Some states require voters to appear in person the first time they vote in the state or in a new county. Massachusetts does not have such a rule.

If your home state has this requirement, you should make sure you will be able to go in person to the relevant polling place on Election Day. If not, you should consider registering in Massachusetts instead.

Additionally, to avoid an eligibility challenge at the polls in Massachusetts, first time voters with an out-of-state driver's license should bring an alternative form of acceptable identification containing their local address, as described in the "ID Requirements and Student IDs" section.



According to the U.S. Supreme Court, students have the right to register and vote in their college towns if they meet the same requirements as everyone else. Misinformation, such as claims that registering to vote at school may jeopardize eligibility for financial aid or insurance, are sometimes used to discourage students from voting locally.

Common Questions from Out-of-State Students

Will I lose my scholarship if I register to vote in Massachusetts?

If you receive scholarship money from a state, county or town, or a private entity (i.e., an entity other than the federal government) you should confirm with the entity providing the scholarship that residency in a particular place is not a requirement of the scholarship and/or that voter registration in Massachusetts will not affect your eligibility.

Will registering to vote in Massachusetts affect my driver's license or car registration?

a. Registering to vote in Massachusetts makes you a resident for the purposes of your driver's license and vehicle registration. If you drive your vehicle in Massachusetts, you have 30 days from when you register to vote to register your vehicle and get a Massachusetts driver's license. For more information, you may wish to contact the Massachusetts Department of Motor Vehicles.

Will voting in Massachusetts affect my federal financial aid?

Federal financial aid such as Pell Grants and Perkins and Stafford loans will not be affected by where you register to vote. Registering in Massachusetts will also not affect your dependency status regarding FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).

What do residency and domicile mean?

Residency and domicile are legal terms that states use to describe where you currently live and where you intend to remain for the foreseeable future.

Will registering to vote in Massachusetts prevent my parents from claiming me as a dependent on their taxes?

No. Students are often told that registering to vote in a different state from their parents will make them lose their dependency status. This is not true. Where you register to vote will have no effect on your parent's tax status.

Will registering to vote in Massachusetts affect my tuition costs?

It shouldn't. Most schools will still consider you an out-of-state student even if you register to vote in Massachusetts. Check with your school's registrar for specifics of your school.

This Guide was prepared by FELN staff who are not licensed to practice law in Massachusetts and FELN intends that the information contained herein is used only as a general guide. This document should not be used as a substitute for consultation with a licensed Massachusetts legal professional.

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