

Ballots, Election Mail, and USPS Postmarking

On December 24, 2025, the United States Postal Service (USPS) published revisions to the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) regarding USPS's [policies and operations related to the use of postmarks](#). The USPS indicated that these are not changes to how mail is postmarked, but rather, clarify what information such markings can be reliably taken to convey.

What is not changing: It is longstanding USPS policy to treat all Ballot Mail as First-Class Mail, regardless of its actual paid mail class, and to endeavor to postmark every return ballot mailed by a voter. USPS has also clarified in the DMM that the date of a postmark may not always necessarily reflect the exact date that USPS took custody of a piece of mail. This has always been true due to mail processing delays, where a small number of mail pieces may end up postmarked the day after USPS takes possession of them.

What may increase urgency for voters: USPS has acknowledged that the Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO) initiative, which includes the consolidation of mail processing centers across the country, *will make it more common that postmarks may not necessarily reflect the date that USPS took possession of a mail piece.*

Map out important dates that may be impacted by delayed postmarking, including:

- Voter registration deadlines
- Vote by mail request application deadlines
- Ballot drop off deadlines

Know the rules in your state or territory:

- Are deadlines in your state or territory based on when the mail is received by the election officials or when it is postmarked?
- It is not uncommon for ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by election day and received within a set number of days post election day (typically around 5 days).

- You can find [more information here](#).

Know voter options in your state/territory, including:

- Are voters allowed to drop off in person at polling sites or the election office?
- Are drop boxes available for voters to return their ballots?
- Is electronic vote by mail available to voters with disabilities or with print disabilities including full electronic return to avoid printing and postmarking entirely? This is available in a limited number of states.
- Are voters required to use postal mail to return their ballots without the option to drop them off in person (which is limited but does happen in some states)?
- Voters who are able to can also go inside a post office location and request to have it postmarked while the voter is present to ensure it will be marked on the date it was dropped off.
- Voters may not want to prioritize dropping off ballots or election mail in blue postal boxes unless necessary.
- Voters who will be out of town may want to consider in person absentee or in person early voting, if possible and accessible. Military and diplomatic voters have expanded options and do not necessarily rely on the postal system, so they may not be as impacted. Overseas civilians should definitely plan ahead. For more on overseas voting, visit [US Vote Foundation](#) or [FVAP](#).

Focus on:

- Brush up on the [USPS postmarking myth vs. fact](#).
- Messaging to voters not to delay with any election related mail. Get it, fill it out, return it right away. The USPS recommends dropping off no less than 7 days before the deadline.
- Urge voters to plan ahead if they have to get a notary, witness signatures, include a copy of photo ID, need an assistant, or do not have a physical location nearby to vote or drop off in person.
- Keep tabs on how accessible and widespread different options are, including post offices, polling places, vote centers, election offices, drop boxes, etc. Rural areas are less likely to have these options nearby, and

voters may need to really think ahead. You can also use the [USPS Post Office Locator](#).

Remember and remind voters with disabilities: There is no need for voters to panic. Just be prepared and don't delay! If you are ready, your ballot will get post marked and counted.