

State Law Resource

Michigan: Voter Registration

Disclosure

These resources are current as of 11/17/20. We do our best to periodically update these resources and welcome any comments or questions regarding new developments in the law. Please email us at advocacy@afj.org.

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE

The following changes/additions have been made since the previous version of this guide:

- Updated “Pending Legislation”
- Updated to include changes to Michigan Law regarding no reason absentee voting; automatic voter registration; election day registration; and registration up to 15 days before an election.

This guide summarizes key aspects of laws governing voter registration on the state level. It is not intended to provide legal advice or to serve as a substitute for legal advice.

In some jurisdictions, city and/or county regulations may also apply to certain political activities. Check with the appropriate local jurisdiction before undertaking any activity.

Contents

Deadlines for Registration

- Automatic Voter Registration**
- Does State Offer Election Day Registration?**
- Does State Allow By-Mail Registration?**
- No Reason Absentee Voting**
- May Voter Register Before Turning 18?**

Photo ID Requirements

- Registration Requirements**
- Voting Requirements**
- Provisional Ballots**
- Proof of Citizenship**

Voter Registration Drives

- Frequently Asked Questions**

Contact Information for State and Local Agencies

Deadlines for Registration

In Michigan, voters must register with the clerk of the county, township, or city in which he or she resides, in person, by mail, or online until the 15th day before any given election they wish to participate in. MCL § 168.497(1). Voters may also register to vote between the 14th day before the election and up through election day in person. See “Same Day Registration” below for the process.

Under MCL § 168.492, every person who has the following qualifications is eligible to register to vote:

- A citizen of the U.S.;
- Not less than 17-½ years old;
- A resident of Michigan; and
- A resident of the township or city.

Voters can register to vote for federal, state, and local elections in person at their county, city, or township clerk’s office or at a Secretary of State local branch office. Voters can submit their registration application to the clerk of their county, city, or township or to the Secretary of State by mail. Voters can also apply to register to vote by submitting an electronic voter registration application. MCL § 168.509v.

In addition, the following State agencies offer voter registration services to their clients: Department of Human Services, the Department of Community Health, the Department of Career Development, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, and the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. Military recruitment centers also provide voter registration services. This list is maintained by the office of the Governor. MCL § 168.509u.

Automatic Voter Registration

The Secretary of State shall automatically register to vote each individual who meets the qualifications under MCL 168.492 and who indicates on his or her operator’s or chauffeur’s license application, official state personal identification card application, or change of address application that he or she is a citizen of the United States. MCL § 168.493a.

The Secretary of State shall not automatically register an individual who indicates that he or she declines to use the application as a voter registration application. MCL § 168.493a(3).

Does state offer Election Day registration?

Yes, voters can now apply for registration in person at the city or township clerk's office of the city or township in which he or she resides from the 14th day before an election and continuing through the day of the election by providing proof of residency such as (1) an operator's, chauffeur's, or an enhanced drivers license; or (2) an official state personal identification card or enhanced official state personal identification card. MCL § 168.497(2).

Does state allow by-mail registration?

Yes. MCL § 168.509v. Completed registration applications can be mailed to the Secretary of State, the clerk of the county, city, or township in which the applicant resides, or a designated voter registration agency.

Registration forms must be received or postmarked by the fifteenth day before an election in order to be effective for that election. In the event that the postmark is missing or unclear, forms must be received through the mail on or before the eighth day before an election and the application must be dated by the applicant on or before the fifteenth day before an election. MCL § 168.509x.

[Mail-in registration forms](#) are available on the Secretary of State's website.

No reason absentee voting

All eligible and registered voters in Michigan may now request an absent voter ballot without providing a reason.

Eligible voters can request to have an absent voter ballot mailed to them. Requests must be received by the clerk of the township or city no later than 5:00 p.m. the Friday before the election.

Absentee voters have until 8:00 p.m. on election day to complete and return the ballot to the clerk's office.

Absentee voters must sign the return envelope and the signature will be checked against the individual's signature on file. MCL § 168.761.

May voter register before turning 18?

Yes. Individuals who are 17-½ years of age may register to vote. MCL § 168.492.

Photo ID Requirements

Registration Requirements

If a voter is submitting a registration in person to the clerk or assistant clerk of the township, city, or village in which his or her precinct is located, he or she may be asked for a form of photo identification; however if the voter does not have identification, he or she must produce a signature attesting to the validity of the statements in the application. MCL § 168.499. Each clerk and assistant clerk has the power to administer oaths and to swear persons as to the truth of statements contained in an application.

If a voter is submitting a registration by mail and is a first time voter, Michigan law requires the individual to vote in person in the first election in which they vote (unless they request an absentee ballot in person), and must also provide the following proof of ID when registering (see MCLS § 168.509t):

- Registrant must include his or her state issued driver's license or person ID number on the registration form or
- Send a copy of one of the following forms of ID:
 - Current and valid photo ID,
 - Paycheck stub, utility bill, bank statement or government document listing the registrant's name and address.

Those who do not fulfill this identification requirement at the time of registration may provide one of the above items at the polls on election day, or, if voting by mail, may provide a copy of one of the above items with the absent voter ballot application or absent voter ballot.

Voters with a disability (as defined in MCL § 37.1103), voters entitled to vote by absentee ballot under the Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, and persons who have registered to vote in a jurisdiction in Michigan in which persons are exempted from the general "first time" voter rule. MCL § 168.509t(2).

The identification requirement for first-time by mail applicants does not apply if the voter hand delivers his or her mail registration form to the county or local clerk's office. See [Statement by the Michigan Secretary of State, October 27, 2006](#).

If an applicant for voter registration is unable to write, or sign his or her name on the voter registration application because of a physical disability, then the applicant may execute the registration affidavit either by making his or her mark or by using a signature stamp. MCL § 168.500.

Voting Requirements

Yes. Michigan voters must provide “identification for election purposes” when voting on Election Day, or sign an affidavit affirming they are not in possession of proper ID. MCL § 168.523.

Pursuant to MCL § 168.727(1), any registered voter of the precinct present in the polling place may challenge the right of anyone attempting to vote if the voter “has good reason to suspect that individual is not a registered elector in that precinct.” However, in regulations implementing the photo identification requirements that were issued to local clerks prior to the November 2005 General Election, the Secretary of State instructed that a voter “cannot be challenged just because he or she is not in possession of a picture ID [and] ... signs the affidavit in order to vote.” See Question 12 of [“Picture Identification at the Polls: Instructions to Election Officials,”](#) Department of State.

Identification for Election Purposes means (see MCLS § 168.2):

- Driver’s license with photo (any state)
- Personal identification card with photo (any state)
- Government issued photo identification card
- Passport
- Student identification card with photo (from a high school or other accredited school)
- Military identification card with photo
- Tribal identification with photo

Provisional Ballots

Under MCL § 168.523a and in furtherance of requirements under the federal Help America Voter Act, a voter who does not appear on the state qualified voter file and cannot produce a receipt issued by the voter’s local or county clerk’s office verifying that they were properly registered to vote is entitled to vote with a provisional ballot.

Prior to casting a provisional ballot, the voter must execute a sworn statement affirming that they submitted a voter registration application before the close of registration and remain eligible to vote in the election. The voter must then complete a new voter registration application, and must state the approximate date and in what manner the previous registration application was submitted. MCL § 168.523a(2).

In furtherance of the voter’s sworn statement, the election inspector shall contact the city or township clerk to verify the accuracy of the information. MCL § 168.523a(3). If the information is accurate, the voter must present identification for election purposes containing a current residence address to establish his or her identity prior to being issued a provisional ballot. MCL § 168.523a(4).

If the voter is unable to present identification for election purposes or the statements in the voter’s affidavit are unable to be verified, the individual shall be issued a provisional ballot that is not tabulated on election day but is secured for verification after the election. MCL §

168.523a(5). The clerk of the relevant jurisdiction must determine whether the ballot is valid within 6 days of the election. MCL § 168.523a(7).

Proof of Citizenship

Is proof of citizenship required in order to register to vote or vote? No. Although Michigan requires an elector to have U.S. citizenship, no requirement to provide proof of citizenship is specified in the law.

Voter Registration Drives

Frequently Asked Questions

DOES MICHIGAN ACCEPT NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT (NVRA) REGISTRATION FORMS? ANY RESTRICTIONS?

Michigan allows the use of the [Federal National Voter Registration Form](#). A signature is required, but it does not have to be witnessed or notarized. MCL § 168.495.

If submitting the Federal National Voter Registration form, under “ID Number” the voter should list their state issued driver’s license number or state issued personal identification card number. If a voter does not have a driver’s license or state issued personal identification card, he or she must include the last four digits of their social security number in this space, or, if a voter does not have a social security number, they should write “NONE” on the form and the Secretary of State will assign a number to the registrant.

MAY GROUPS “CAGE” COMPLETED REGISTRATION FORMS (I.E. ASKS VOTERS TO MAIL THEM BACK TO THE GROUP, WHICH WILL THEN SEND THEM TO THE APPROPRIATE ELECTIONS REGISTRAR(S))? IF SO, MAY THEY COPY THE FORMS OR ANY OF THE DATA INCLUDED ON THEM? IF SO, ANY DEADLINES FOR SENDING THE COMPLETED FORMS TO THE STATE OR TO LOCAL OFFICIALS?

There are no privacy regulations under Michigan law to restrict persons or groups conducting voter registration drives from copying or otherwise retaining the completed applications before they are delivered to the appropriate office. While the originals must be turned in to the election registration authorities, copies of forms may be kept for purposes of Get Out the Vote activity or in order to insure that the registrations are processed.

Persons conducting voter registration drives are not required to deliver or mail completed voter registration applications within a specific time period, but applications must be received 15 days prior to the election to be processed for that election.

Organizations may mail completed registration applications to the appropriate election office(s) individually or in a bundle.

MAY A GROUP “PRE-FILL” SOME OR ALL OF THE FORM BEFORE SENDING/ GIVING IT TO A WOULD-BE REGISTRANT?

There is no provision in Michigan law or regulations prohibiting voter registration

organizations from making marks on an applicant's voter registration form.

A group that pre-fills an application should be aware that in Michigan, the same address must be used for voter registration and driver license purposes. When registering, a voter must provide an address that matches the address shown on a driver license or personal identification card issued by the State of Michigan. If a different address is provided, the Secretary of State will automatically change the voter's driver license or personal identification card address to match the residence address provide on the voter registration form. If such an address change is made, the Secretary of State then mails the voter an address update sticker for their driver license or personal identification card.

MAY VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE WORKERS ASSIST A VOTER IN COMPLETING THEIR REGISTRATION FORM?

There is no provision in Michigan law or regulations prohibiting voter registration organizations from making marks on an applicant's voter registration form.

DOES STATE REQUIRE TRAINING OF VOTER REGISTRATION WORKERS?

No. Michigan does not currently impose any restrictions on third party registration.

DOES STATE REQUIRE REGISTRATION OF VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES? IF SO, FOR BY-MAIL DRIVES, TOO?

No. Michigan does not currently impose any restrictions on third party registration.

ANY REQUIREMENT THAT A GROUP MUST PROVIDE INFORMATION TO VOTERS ABOUT HOW THEY MAY CONTACT THE GROUP TO DETERMINE THE STATUS OF THEIR REGISTRATION?

No. Michigan does not currently impose any restrictions on third party registration.

Note: Michigan provides an online verification system for voter registration at www.michigan.gov/vote and also at www.publius.org.

MAY A GROUP PAY VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE WORKERS? IF SO, IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO PAY ON A PER-VOTER-REGISTERED BASIS?

There is no provision in Michigan law or regulations prohibiting the payment of voter registration drive workers, including payments on a per-voter basis.

Contact Information for State and Local Authorities

Secretary of State and the Bureau of Elections:
Michigan Department of State
Bureau of Elections
PO Box 20126
Lansing, MI 48901-0726

Overnight/Express Deliveries:
Michigan Department of State
Bureau of Elections
Richard H. Austin Building - First Floor
430 W. Allegan
Lansing, MI 48918

You May Also Contact the Bureau By:

Phone: (517) 373-2540

Fax: (517) 241-4785

County Clerk Search: <https://webapps.sos.state.mi.us/mivote/ClerkSearch.aspx>

Website: www.michigan.gov/sos

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FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE

For assistance regarding these resources or for more information about federal law, please contact our attorney one-on-one counseling service:

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