



Summary of Virginia Election Law Changes in 2020

Vote-by-Mail

The League of Women Voters is lobbying Governor Northam and legislators for a total vote-by-mail system as the safest way to vote in this year's elections. So far, the General Assembly and the governor have failed to act despite the health threat posed by the coronavirus.

All voters, however, are encouraged to vote by absentee ballot. You can apply for an absentee ballot online by going to elections.virginia.gov IF you have a valid Virginia driver's license. If you do not have a driver's license, you can download a paper application from that site or call your local registrar for an application.

June 23rd Primary

In Montgomery and Floyd counties and Radford, the June primary election is ONLY a Republican primary to select a candidate to run against U.S. Senator Mark Warner, the Democratic candidate. There is NO Democratic primary. Thanks to advocacy by our state League, Virginia citizens now have an additional eight days to register to vote—until May 26th. The deadline to apply for an absentee ballot for the primary is June 16th. State law still requires you to give a reason for voting by absentee ballot. The reason you should list is "2A My disability or illness" due to COVID-19. Voters who choose the absentee option should do so as soon as possible so they can return their ballots by mail by Election Day.

For the June primary only, the state has waived a requirement that voters must find a witness to watch them open their absentee ballot, see them vote and then sign the envelope before the voter returns it. This waiver is a result of a lawsuit initiated by the League of Women Voters of Virginia to protect the health of voters who are self-isolating. A federal judge has not yet ruled on the witness requirement for the November election.

Remember, if you deliver your absentee ballot in person rather than mailing it, ONLY the voter can submit their absentee ballot. Your husband, your best friend, the nursing home director can NOT deliver your absentee ballot for you. It will be thrown away.

All the polls will be open for the June 23rd primary with new rules on social distancing - decided by each precinct chair. For those who insist on absentee voting in person before Election Day, the Montgomery County Registrar's Office will have a table in the County Office Building vestibule, 755 Roanoke St., Christiansburg, when the building reopens possibly by the end of the month. A buzzer will summon someone from the Registrar's Office. IF the person is handicapped, there will be a sign for handicapped voters and a buzzer accessible from outside. In person absentee voting ends on Saturday, June 20th. On Election Day, you MUST vote in your precinct.

No-excuse 45-day Early Voting

Beginning with this fall's presidential and congressional election, Virginia voters can apply for an absentee ballot or vote in person up to 45 days before the election without having to

state a reason. Virginia had been one of only 18 states that allowed absentee voting ONLY if you could meet a state-approved reason - such as surgery or a business trip.

Montgomery County Registrar Connie Viar will open a voting site for in-person voting in a multipurpose room in the County Office Building, 755 Roanoke St., Christiansburg, 45 days before the election. The office will need additional staff and funding to do this, but at present there are no plans for a satellite office. [The County Office Building—including Registrar's Office—is closed to the public at present but may reopen later this month.] You are encouraged to order your absentee ballot now for the Nov. 3rd presidential and congressional election—500 are already submitted. The deadline for registering to vote for the Nov. 3rd election is **October 13th**. **October 27th** is the deadline for applying for an absentee ballot. Guidelines for local election officials are due from the state by early July.

Redistricting

One of the League's top legislative priorities for years has been ending partisan gerrymandering. This year, the General Assembly passed on a second vote a constitutional amendment creating the Virginia Redistricting Commission. This amendment must be approved by voters on Nov. 3rd to become part of Virginia's constitution. Please share information with your friends and family about how important it is to vote "YES" on this amendment this fall. Go to onevirginia2021.org for specific information on how the commission will guarantee state and congressional redistricting that does not favor either political party. The commission will:

- be made up of eight legislators and eight citizens with a citizen chairperson
- be selected by retired judges from lists provided by both parties in both chambers of the General Assembly
- require the votes of six legislators and six citizens to pass the maps
- allow the legislature to have an up-or-down vote but not the ability to amend
- require every step of the proceedings to be open to the public

Election Day Holiday

The General Assembly this year made Election Day a holiday, canceling the Lee-Jackson Day holiday, to make voting easier and more accessible for voters who work.

Photo IDs and Voter Registration

Starting in the November election, voters will NOT have to show a photo ID. You can use other forms of identity such as a utility bill with your name and address, etc. Also, citizens will be automatically registered to vote at the DMV when they apply for a driver's license - unless they opt out. Previously, you had to ask to register to vote.

High School Voters

The General Assembly passed a bill this spring stating that schools must give students access to register to vote. This could be an opportunity for our League to become more involved in student voter registration.

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