**EXTENDING THE USE OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS**

CGS 9-135, Public Act 2020-3 July Special Session & HB 7005 September Special Session

Connecticut law allows you to receive an absentee ballot if you cannot appear at your assigned polling place on election day because of active service in the Armed Forces of the United States, absence from the town during all of the hours of voting, illness, religious tenets forbid secular activity on the day of the election, duties as an election official at a polling place other than your own during all of the hours of voting, physical disability, or COVID 19

Knowing an extended use of absentee ballots will increase the number of ballots the following additional procedures will be used:

* Town Clerks will be provided additional resources to allow for the hiring of additional officials to further the administration of a larger pool of absentee ballot voters.
  + Cities and towns will receive supplemental grant funding for the cost associated with the administration of absentee ballots.
  + Town Clerks will receive PPEs from the supply provided to ROVs for the polls.
  + For offices that don’t allow 6’ separation. Establish a contingency plan (i.e. work staggered shifts, use the Registrars of Voter’s office or any other location in town that can establish a connection to CVRS.)
* We will use Fort Orange Press (mail house) to facilitate the mailing of the revamped absentee ballot application to all eligible voters. All applications for this project were mailed by the mail house by September 15, 2020.
  + A one-time data extract of the Centralized Voter Registration System was sent to the mail house for the absentee ballot mailing on midnight of August 26, 2020.
  + Using this list, each eligible voter will be sent an application for absentee ballot that is pre-populated with the voter’s personal information. This application will explain that due to COVID-19 they are eligible to vote using an absentee ballot as long as they return the application to their local town clerk.
  + Applications will be printed with a bar code unique to that voter that will allow the town clerks to search for the voter within the Centralized Voter Registration System more efficiently.
* CVRS will have multiple functionalities to process absentee ballot applications. In the main Navigation Menu under “Activities” the “Elections” tab will have two (2) options for processing absentee ballot applications. The first option will allow the town clerk to process absentee applications (ED-3) with no barcode or Voter ID number as they have normally done in the past. The second option will allow the town clerk to process any application that has a pre-printed barcode or Voter ID number on the application.

**PROCESSING APPLICATIONS SENT TO THE VOTER WITH A BARCODE OR VOTER ID NUMBER**

* Once the application is returned, the town clerk will enter the return information into the Centralized Voter Registration System.
* The Town Clerk will scan the bar code or type the Voter ID Number on the application.
* The first entry for each session will require the Town Clerk to select their default values common to each application, such as the election date. Once those are selected, the selected values will remain for the entirety of the session.
* If there is a mailing address different from the voter’s residence address, the Town Clerk will need to manually select the ‘Ballot Mailing Address’ option, enter the mailing address and then scan the application. If the ballot is being mailed to the voter’s residence address, CVRS will auto populate the address.
* The ‘Serial Number’ will be generated automatically and updated in the database. The serial number will be unique and easily identifiable to each specific city or town. CVRS is programmed to assign a serial that begins with your town code and then a random number (i.e. 16400101, 16400204, etc.)
* The serial number will also populate on the voter label at the bottom of the party field.
* Once scanned, CVRS will automatically print out labels to be used on the envelopes for mailing out the absentee ballot.
* The town clerk will then assemble the absentee ballot package and mail the ballot to the voter within the prescribed timeframe. (October 2, 2020 or within 48 hours of the receipt of the application).

*Note: The Secretary of the State has provided a postage paid Serial Numbered envelope to be used in the absentee ballot package. The Town Clerk can also use existing Serial Numbered envelopes as long as postage has been affixed to that envelope before the package is issued to the voter.*

*Using the Centralized Voter Registration System will also automatically update the Secretary of the State’s voter look-up page. This will allow a voter to track (1) when the Town Clerk has processed their absentee ballot, and (2) when the Town Clerk has received their absentee ballot.*

**PROCESSING ABSENTEE BALLOT APPLICATIONS WITHOUT THE BARCODE OR VOTER ID**

* Any absentee ballot application (ED-3) that does **not** have a barcode to scan must be manually entered into the “Absentee Ballot” screen. This process has not changed from past practice. Town Clerks should use this screen to process previously received absentee ballot applications, Emergency Ballot applications, Military/Overseas Ballots, requests for replacement ballots or any voter that comes to town hall to vote but did not bring the application that was automatically sent to the voter.
* This is a reminder of the current procedure for the “Absentee Ballot” process:
  + The town clerk will search for the voter by name, DOB, or street. On the Select page, select the voter by clicking the radio button displayed next to the correct voter’s name and click on “Select” button. This will navigate the town clerk to the “Add Absentee Ballot” screen.
  + To insert an absentee ballot application into CVRS, click on “Insert” button.
  + Click on the “Select” radio button and provide the required information in the fields for Election Date, Election Code, etc.
  + To mail the ballot to the voter’s residential address, click on the “Use Residence Address” radio button. CVRS will automatically populate the residential address.
  + To mail the ballot to an address other than their residential address, click on the “Use Mailing Address” radio button and enter in the mailing address.
  + The town clerk will utilize the serial number on the Ed-8 serial numbered envelope.
  + Click on the “Update” button to save the information.
  + Click on the “Generate Labels” button to print the electoral label for the serial numbered envelope and, if needed, the mailing label to mail the absentee ballot.

**RETURN OF A VOTED ABSENTEE BALLOT**

* Once the voter has completed their absentee ballot, they would be able to return their ballot in one of three ways. (1) return their ballot using the US Mail, (2) return their ballot directly to the town clerk’s office in person, or (3) return their ballot using the drop box location at the local town hall. Any ballot deposited in the drop box shall be considered ‘returned by mail.’ This will prevent ballots from being rejected if the designee section is not filled out.
* Once the ballot is returned by the voter, the Town Clerk and Registrars of Voters can begin to pre-check and pre-sort the absentee ballots 14 days prior to the election.
* Any voter who wished to withdraw their absentee ballot must do so with their Town Clerk by 5 PM of the fourth day prior to the election.
* Beginning at 5 PM of the fourth day prior to the election, the Town Clerk can provide the absentee ballots received to the Registrars of Voters who can appoint absentee ballot counter to remove the inner envelope from the outer envelope of the ballot set. No inner envelope shall be opened during this process.
* If there is an issue with the outer or inner envelope during this process, the absentee ballot shall be rejected, marked and replaced in the outer envelope.
* Once the pre-checking, sorting and opening of outer envelopes has been complete, the normal processing and counting of the ballots will occur within the municipality on election day. No ballots can be counted until election day.
* Counting of ballots may begin as early as 6 AM on election day.
* Reporting of election results must be by district and must be made using the Election Management System.
* The reporting deadline for each municipality have been relaxed. The deadline for reporting results has been moved by the legislature to 96 hours (4 days) after the close of the polls, however, result can be reported earlier than this deadline.
* Any absentee ballots returned on the days before the election will be pre-checked and a notation will be placed next to the voter’s name on the official check list “A”.
* Any ballots returned on the day of the election shall be held for counting until after the close of the polls. After the close of the polls those ballots will be compared against the registry list used at the appropriate polling place to ensure that an absentee ballot voter did not also appear at the polls to case a ballot.
* Ballot Drop boxes shall be locked at 8 P.M. on election day.

**REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL BALLOTS**

In a circumstance where an additional ballot is requested, the town clerk will still process these requests. Using existing process, the voter will use an ED-3A and submit the application to the town clerk. The town clerk will automatically reject the first ballot issued, issue a second ballot to the voter and count such ballot if it is filed by the close of the polls on election day.

**Military/Overseas Ballots** – Town Clerks shall continue to process new applications for military ballots and overseas ballots as they normally would do. 45 days before the November 3, 2020 election is September 18, 2020.

**Emergency Ballots** – Town clerks shall continue to process Emergency Ballots as they have done so in the past.