



From Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas

Media Fact Sheet: How the SAVE America Act Would Impact Connecticut

Fast Facts

This summary reflects provisions in the SAVE America Act and amendments currently under debate in the U.S. Senate.

- Changes the types of identification used to register to vote—from commonly used forms of ID in Connecticut, such as a REAL ID driver's license, to documentary proof of U.S. citizenship.
- Requires voters to present documents in person to register to vote and for any change to registration, including name and address changes, and updating party affiliation.
- Eliminates the ability to fully complete registration or updates online or by mail.
- Creates additional ID requirements to vote.
- Requires voters without acceptable photo ID at the polls to cast a provisional ballot and return with ID within a set timeframe for their vote to be counted.
- Requires election officials to evaluate citizenship documents, resolve discrepancies across records, and determine whether documentation meets federal standards.
- Limits reasons a voter may vote by absentee ballot.
- Requires absentee voters to submit a sworn statement and documentary proof in support of the reason they are voting absentee and places election officials in the position of judging the validity of the reason.
- Limits the return of absentee ballots to in person delivery or return by certified mail paid for by the municipality or state.
- Introduces new legal exposure for election officials by allowing private civil actions related to voter registration compliance, with potential legal and financial consequences.
- Creates new, locally borne municipal costs, including staffing, training, technology upgrades, document management and retention, and potential mailing costs associated with absentee ballot return requirements.
- Does not include federal funding, leaving municipalities responsible for implementation costs.
- Would take effect in advance of the November 2026 election, based on the bill's current language.

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As the U.S. Senate debates the [SAVE America Act](#), a federal election proposal that expands earlier versions of the SAVE Act and incorporates elements of the Make Elections Great Again Act, the Office of the Secretary of the State has developed this document to provide clear, accurate, and timely Connecticut-focused information to support reporting on this rapidly evolving federal proposal. The Act would introduce new federal requirements for how voters register, make changes to their voter registration, and vote.

As the SAVE America Act is written, its requirements for documentary proof of citizenship when registering to vote and voter ID when voting in person -- or by absentee -- would take effect in advance of the November 2026 election. This means that these changes could be implemented during a federal election cycle, even as guidance, systems, and resources are still being established, and without dedicated federal funding.

Says Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas:

“No matter what changes at the federal level, our job in Connecticut remains the same: to make sure every eligible voter can cast their ballot securely. This means ensuring the process is clear, accessible, funded, and centered on the people we serve.”

What is the SAVE Act?

In common usage, three Acts are often referred to collectively as the SAVE Act: the SAVE Act, the SAVE America Act, and the Make Elections Great Again Act.

The SAVE America Act is a federal proposal introduced in Congress in 2026 that is based off of earlier proposed legislation known as the SAVE Act (Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act). The current version passed the U.S. House of Representatives in February 2026 and is now being debated in the U.S. Senate along with proposed amendments (taken from the proposed Make Elections Great Again Act) that would change eligibility, documentation, and return requirements for absentee voting. That debate started on Monday, March 16. The bill establishes new national requirements related to voter registration, proof of citizenship, and voter ID for federal elections.



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It also establishes ongoing federal requirements for voter list verification and introduces new enforcement and compliance obligations for elected officials.

What does the SAVE America Act require to register to vote?

The SAVE America Act would **require people to prove their U.S. citizenship** before being registered to vote or when changing their voter registration.

To register, voters would need to present documentary proof of U.S. citizenship in person to an election official. Acceptable documentation would include an original, certified:

- U.S. passport
- A U.S. birth certificate that includes specific information, issued by a state or local vital records office
- Consular Report of Birth Abroad
- Certificate of Naturalization
- Certificate of Citizenship

Photocopies or digital versions would not be accepted.

In Connecticut, a driver's license or REAL ID verifies identity, but not citizenship.

On its own, it would not meet these new requirements, so additional documentation would be required to register. Voters could still start the registration process online, by mail, or through agencies like the DMV, but their registration would not be complete until they present proof of citizenship in person.

Election officials would be required to review and retain this documentation. They would also need to determine whether submitted materials meet federal standards, including having to use their judgement to resolve discrepancies such as differences in names across documents.

What happens if a voter's name does not match their citizenship documents?

If a voter's current legal name does not match the name on their citizenship documents, they would need to provide additional documentation to show the connection between the two. This could include records such as a marriage certificate, divorce paperwork, court order, or other official documentation reflecting a name change.



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For example, a voter whose current identification reflects a married name, but whose birth certificate reflects a prior name, may need to present both documents along with a marriage certificate or other record linking the two names when registering.

Would the proof-of-citizenship requirement only apply to new voters?

No. Proof of citizenship would also be required for any voter registration update, such as when a person moves, changes their name, or updates their party affiliation.

What does the SAVE America Act require to cast a vote?

Separate and different from its registration requirements, the SAVE America Act would require voters to present valid, unexpired photo ID in order to cast a ballot in federal elections.

Election officials would be required to verify this photo ID before issuing a ballot in federal elections. Acceptable forms of ID would include an unexpired:

- State driver's license
- State-issued photo ID
- U.S. passport
- Military ID
- Certain tribal ID
- Other government-issued photo ID permitted by the state (excluding student IDs)

These forms of ID verify identity at the time of voting and do not establish citizenship, which is addressed during registration.

What happens if a person shows up to vote without the required photo ID?

A voter who appears at the polls without the required photo ID would be allowed to cast a provisional ballot. However, for their vote to be counted, they would have to go in person to their registrars' office and present acceptable ID within three days for the ballot to be counted. Election officials would be required to track these provisional ballots and confirm whether voters return within the required timeframe before ballots can be counted.

Would voters still be able to vote by absentee ballot?

The SAVE America Act would require voters casting absentee ballots to provide identification by returning identifying information or documentation with their ballot for election officials to review, rather than verifying their identity at the polls. It



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would also introduce additional requirements related to eligibility, documentation, and ballot return. A new proposed amendment would change Connecticut's current absentee voting process by requiring voters to:

- Provide a qualifying reason to vote absentee
- Submit a sworn statement
- Submit supporting documentation verifying that reason
- Demonstrate that the qualifying condition applies for the entire voting period, from the start of early voting through election day

The amendment also proposes new restrictions on how absentee ballots may be returned, limiting return to in-person delivery, certified mail, or a narrow group of authorized individuals. Election officials would be responsible for reviewing and evaluating this documentation and determining whether voters meet these requirements. Qualifiers to vote by absentee would include:

- Being on active military duty and deployed outside of where you are registered to vote. Spouses and dependents are also eligible.
- Having an illness, disability, or hospitalization that makes you unable to vote in person during the entire voting period. A sworn statement describing the condition, along with documentation that verifies the condition, must be submitted.
- Being the primary caregiver of a person who is medically incapacitated during the entire voting period. A sworn statement describing the condition and certifying that it prevents the caregiver from voting in person during the entire voting period must be presented, along with supporting documentation.
- Traveling outside the voting district for the entirety of the voting period. A sworn statement describing the travel, and documentation verifying it, must be submitted. This exemption does not apply to Americans living overseas.
- Having another hardship deemed sufficient by election officials. A sworn statement describing the hardship, along with documentation establishing its existence and duration, must also be submitted. As written, the bill provides no clear definition for what qualifies as a hardship.

In Connecticut, absentee voting is currently available to voters who meet one of several statutory eligibility criteria, including absence from town, illness, physical disability, or religious tenets that prevent voting in person. Military and overseas voters are also eligible. Voters complete an application and attest to their eligibility. They are not currently required to submit supporting documentation.



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Could these new requirements create challenges for voters?

Yes. Registering or updating your registration would no longer be something you can complete online or by mail alone. It would require locating specific citizenship documents — such as a passport or birth certificate — and bringing them in person to a local election office.

In Connecticut, this would create additional steps for voters who move or update their registration frequently.

- For example, renters, college students, and other residents who change addresses would need to complete this process each time they move.
- Similarly, voters who change their name due to marriage or divorce would need to provide additional documentation each time they update their registration.

Obtaining required documents can also involve cost and time. For example:

- Certified copies of birth certificates and marriage records in Connecticut typically cost a fee per copy, often around \$20 or more depending on the issuing office
- A U.S. passport generally costs over \$100 for a standard adult application, not including additional fees for expedited processing or photos

In addition to cost, obtaining these documents may require in-person requests, mailed applications, or processing time that can range from several days to several weeks, depending on the document and issuing agency.

In practice, this could mean multiple steps, added expense, and in-person visits to election offices for voters who are currently able to register or update their information through existing online or mail-based systems. For example, a voter who moves, changes their name, and does not have immediate access to citizenship documents may need to complete multiple steps before being able to update their registration.

What new responsibilities would election officials have under the SAVE America Act?

The SAVE America Act would significantly expand the responsibilities of local election officials. In addition to being required to process all voter registrations and changes in person, officials would be required to:

- Review and evaluate documentary proof of citizenship
- Determine whether submitted documents meet federal standards
- Resolve discrepancies across documents, including name differences



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- Retain and track documentation associated with voter records
- Conduct ongoing voter list verification using federal and state databases, including the Department of Homeland Security SAVE program
- Notify voters and manage response timelines when citizenship questions arise
- Implement and track provisional ballot processes tied to ID verification
- Manage new absentee ballot eligibility and documentation requirements, if enacted
- Receive and manage federal notifications when individuals become naturalized U.S. citizens, including integrating that information into voter registration processes

These responsibilities would be ongoing and year-round, not limited to Election Day or voter registration periods.

The bill also introduces new legal exposure by allowing private individuals to bring civil actions related to enforcement of proof-of-citizenship requirements, which could subject election officials to court orders, financial penalties, or other legal consequences including time in jail if they are found to have registered individuals without the required documentation. This represents a shift from existing enforcement mechanisms by expanding who may bring legal challenges related to voter registration compliance.

Because the bill is written to take effect immediately, these changes could be required without a transition period for implementation.

What would this mean for Connecticut towns?

Connecticut's elections are administered locally across 169 towns, many with part-time election offices. If enacted, the SAVE America Act would shift significant new responsibilities onto municipalities — not just to registrars of voters, but to the broader town infrastructure that supports election administration. In practice, these changes would shift both operational responsibility and financial impact to municipalities.

At the town level, this could mean:

- Increased municipal costs to support additional staff time, overtime, or new hires to manage in-person registration, document review, and follow-up with voters
- Expanded training requirements for election staff and potentially other municipal employees involved in handling sensitive documentation



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- Technology and system upgrades, including updates to voter registration systems, secure storage for personal documents, and potential integration with federal verification databases
- Legal and compliance costs, including responding to new federal requirements and potential civil actions brought by private individuals
- Facility and operational impacts, such as accommodating increased in-person traffic at town halls or registrar offices
- Greater coordination across town departments, including registrars of voters, town clerks, IT staff, and legal counsel

These changes and others could result in significant direct costs to municipalities. For example, under the Act, absentee ballot return would be limited to in-person delivery or certified mail paid by the state or municipality. Sending a ballot by certified mail would cost about \$6 per ballot, which means that under this proposal, the 5,000 absentee ballots Stamford processed in 2024 – if repeated in 2026 -- would add \$30,000 in mailing costs to the election.

Statewide, Connecticut processed more than 120,000 absentee ballots in 2024 and more than 600,000 in 2020. At those volumes, certified mail costs alone could range from between \$700,000 to \$4 million per election, depending on turnout – with no federal funding provided.

These financial impacts would vary widely across municipalities. Only 17 towns in Connecticut have full-time registrars of voters, and many smaller towns operate with limited staffing and resources. For example, the town of Beacon Falls budgets approximately \$30,150 annually for part-time election officials, while the city of Waterbury budgets approximately \$268,998 in salaries for a full-time registrar's office with multiple staff members. This proposal assumes a level of staffing, capacity, and infrastructure that many Connecticut towns simply do not have – and effectively asks small towns to operate like large cities without the staff, systems, or funding to do so.

Because Connecticut's election system is decentralized, these impacts would not be absorbed at the state level. They would be experienced and managed by individual towns. For smaller municipalities in particular, this could require reallocating limited local resources or increasing municipal spending.

At this time, the bill does not include dedicated federal funding or a clearly defined implementation timeline, which could create additional challenges for towns working to meet new requirements.



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Where can voters find the most accurate election information?

Voters can rely on the Office of the Secretary of the State for the most up-to-date and accurate information, including MyVote.CT.gov and their local town clerk or registrar of voters.