



TENNESSEE IS THE ONLY STATE TO REQUIRE ABSENTEE BALLOTS BE RECEIVED BY MAIL BY THE CLOSE OF POLLS ON ELECTION DAY

Tennesseans voting absentee must return their ballots **by mail**, and the ballots must be received by the close of polls on Election Day. However, voters may request an absentee ballot up to **seven days before Election Day**, meaning a properly requested absentee ballot may not be counted because it does not arrive in time.

Lawmakers could consider policies to address this situation so that all eligible Tennesseans are able to have their vote count.

How Do Other States Handle Absentee Application Deadlines?



Most states allow voters to request an absentee ballot within a week of Election Day.

Tennessee voters, along with voters in 26 other states, can currently request an absentee ballot within seven days of Election Day.[i]



Tennessee and Mississippi voters, however, are the only ones required to return absentee ballots by mail.[ii]

Voters in every other state can also return ballots in person, which alleviates concerns about ballots not arriving on time if requested on the last available day.



Mississippi allows more time for ballots requested by the deadline to travel through the mail.

Election officials in Mississippi accept ballots that have been requested in time (postmarked on or before Election Day) if they are received within five days after Election Day.[iii]

Policy Recommendations

Enhancing, rather than removing, opportunities for voters to participate supports increased civic engagement.

▶ **Keep the current application deadline of seven days before Election Day.**

Maintaining the current window keeps Tennessee aligned with the majority of states.

▶ **Allow voters to return absentee ballots directly to election officials.**

Ballots returned in person could be stored in the same way as those received currently. This would simply allow not just mail carriers but individual voters (or their designee) to give them to election officials.

NOTES

[i] Deadlines for requesting absentee applications:

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| North Dakota | In a Timely Manner to Allow Time to Vote | Nebraska | 2nd Fri. Before Election Day |
| Mississippi | On or Before Election Day | Alaska | 10 Days Before Election Day |
| Connecticut | Day Before Election Day | Florida | 10 Days Before Election Day |
| Minnesota | Day Before Election Day | New York | 10 Days Before Election Day |
| Montana | Day Before Election Day | Arizona | 11 Days Before Election Day |
| Wyoming | Day Before Election Day | Georgia | 11 Days Before Election Day |
| Vermont | Day Before Election Day | South Carolina | 11 Days Before Election Day |
| New Hampshire | Day Before Election Day | Idaho | 11 Days Before Election Day |
| South Dakota | Day Before Election Day | Texas | 11 Days Before Election Day |
| Michigan | Friday Before Election Day | Virginia | 11 Days Before Election Day |
| Maine | 3rd Business Day Before Election Day | Indiana | 12 Days Before Election Day |
| Delaware | 4 Days Before Election Day | Missouri | 2nd Wed. Before Election Day |
| Louisiana | 4 Days Before Election Day | Kentucky | 14 Days Before Election Day |
| Illinois | 5 Days Before Election Day | New Mexico | 14 Days Before Election Day |
| Massachusetts | 5 Days Before Election Day | Iowa | 15 Days Before Election Day |
| Wisconsin | By Mail: 5 Days Before Election Day In Person: Sunday Before Election Day | Rhode Island | 21 Days Before Election Day |
| West Virginia | 6 Days Before Election Day | Oklahoma | 3rd Mon. Before Election Day |
| Kansas | Tuesday Before Election Day | Nevada | Vote By Mail State |
| Maryland | By Mail: 7 Days Before Election Day In Person: Election Day | Colorado | Vote By Mail State |
| Alabama | By Mail: 7 Days Before Election Day In Person: 5 Days Before Election Day | Hawaii | Vote By Mail State |
| Arkansas | By Mail: 7 Days Before Election Day In Person: Friday Before Election Day | DC | Vote By Mail State |
| California | 7 Days Before Election Day | Oregon | Vote By Mail State |
| Tennessee | 7 Days Before Election Day | Washington | Vote By Mail State |
| New Jersey | 7 Days Before Election Day | Utah | Vote By Mail State |
| Ohio | 7 Days Before Election Day | | |
| North Carolina | 7 Days Before Election Day | | |
| Pennsylvania | 7 Days Before Election Day | | |

North Dakota's deadline is "in a timely manner to allow time to vote." N.D.C.C § 16.1-07-05(3). Mississippi Code says absentee applications and ballots must be postmarked on or before Election Day. Mississippi Code Title 23. Elections § 23-15-637(1)(a).

[ii] All states except Tennessee and Mississippi allow voters to return absentee ballots either to local election offices, polling places, or in secured drop boxes.

[iii] Mississippi Code Title 23. Elections § 23-15-721(3).

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