



A Short Guide to Helping Voters Register under Connecticut Law

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

In Connecticut, a person is eligible to register to vote if she or he:¹

- Is at least 18 years old on or before Election Day;
- Is a United States citizen; and
- Is a bona fide resident of the Connecticut town in which she or he is applying.
 - Any person being held at a community correctional center or a correctional institution who are awaiting trial or who have been convicted of a misdemeanor should be considered absent from the town or city of which the person is an inhabitant for purposes of voting, and may apply for an absentee ballot.²

A person is ineligible to register if she or he:

- Is mentally incompetent;³ or
 - No one under guardianship or conservatorship may be denied the right to vote unless a probate court has issued a specific order prohibiting this right.⁴
- Has been convicted of a felony and committed to confinement, either in a State of Connecticut correctional institution or facility or community residence or in a federal or other state correctional institution or facility or community residence, unless the person's rights have been restored.⁵
 - Rights are restored in the following circumstances:
 - If the person was convicted in Connecticut and committed to confinement in a State of Connecticut correctional institution or facility or community residence, rights are restored if the person is released from confinement, and, if applicable, discharged from parole. The Connecticut Commissioner of Corrections must provide the person a document certifying that the person has completed the sentence and, if applicable, parole.⁶
 - If the person was convicted in federal court or out of state or committed to confinement in a federal or out of state correction institution or facility or community residence, rights are restored upon the payment of all fines in conjunction with the conviction and upon release from confinement, and, if applicable, parole.⁷
 - If the person was convicted of an election crime under Connecticut election code, in addition to completing the other requirements, the person must complete any period of probation before being restored to voting rights.⁸

WHAT CONSTITUTES A COMPLETE VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATION?

Federal law⁹ requires that each voter registration application include:

- The applicant's Driver's License or State ID number, or, if none,
- Last four digits of Social Security Number, or, if none
- The state will assign the applicant a number; and
- Checkboxes for the applicant to indicate whether she is a U.S. citizen and will be 18 by Election Day.

Federal law authorizes states to require only such identifying information as "is necessary to enable the



appropriate State election official to assess the eligibility of the applicant and to administer voter registration and other parts of the election process.”¹⁰

In Connecticut, an application will be rejected without the following information:¹¹

- Whether the applicant is a U.S. citizen, provided the registrars of voters have contacted the voter to provide an opportunity to answer this question
- Date of birth
- Residence address (except for zip code)
- Signature of the applicant
- Date of the application

An application may also be rejected if the Secretary of State determines it is “substantially defective.”¹²

WHAT IS THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS?

To vote in a primary election, if the application is mailed in, it must be received or postmarked on or before the 5th day before the primary election.¹³ The deadline for submitting registrations in person before primaries is noon on the last business day before the primary election.¹⁴ To vote in a general election, if the application is mailed in, it must be received or postmarked by the 14th day before the election.¹⁵ If the deadline is a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday, the deadline is the next business day.¹⁶ The deadline for submitting registrations in person before a general election is the 7th day before the election.¹⁷ Applicants who become eligible to register after the general election deadline may register in person up through the last weekday before the election.¹⁸

Eligible individuals who have a signature on file with a state agency which is linked to the voter registration system may also register online.¹⁹

In addition, at designated locations, eligible individuals may register to vote on Election Day and vote an Election Day registration ballot after providing identification showing the person’s residence address.²⁰

WHAT ARE THE STATE RULES GOVERNING VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES?

BEFORE THE DRIVE

A. Does the state require voter registration organizations to register or file other information detailing its voter registration activities?

No.

B. Does the state require any training in order to conduct voter registration drives?

No.

C. Does the state have restrictions on who may help others register to vote?

No.

D. Does the state have restrictions on whether workers may be paid?

No.



E. Can canvassers or the voter registration drive offer something of value to a person in exchange for completing a voter registration application?

Federal law states that whoever "pays or offers to pay or accepts payment either for registration to vote or for voting shall be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than five years."²¹ At least one federal appellate court has interpreted "payment" as "intended to include forms of pecuniary value offered or given directly to an individual voter, and indicated the value should be based on "an assessment of the monetary worth of an item from the perspective of the voter receiving the item." That case held that food vouchers could be "payment."²²

Another example is California's Secretary of State's interpretation of the federal law to mean that "Any type of incentive is considered 'payment,' even things as seemingly innocent as cookies or admission to an entertainment event."²³

DURING THE DRIVE

A. Are there special rules requiring a third party to sign her name to the completed voter registration application?

No, third parties are not generally required to sign their names to the applications. However, if the applicant cannot sign the application, she may authorize another person as her agent to assist her. The agent must sign the applicant's name in the space provided for the signature, followed by the word "by" and then the agent's signature.²⁴ If the applicant signs through an agent, the application will be rejected without the agent's signature.²⁵

B. Are voter registration groups prohibited from putting identifying marks on completed voter registration applications?

Connecticut election law does not address this issue.

C. Are there restrictions on copying completed voter registration applications prior to submitting them to the registrar?

Connecticut election law does not address this issue. The Secretary of State's guide for voter registration drives also indicates that groups must not "reveal the place or organization where an individual applied to register" and indicates that "[t]his information is confidential except for voter registration purposes."²⁶ Project Vote cannot give legal advice but recommends that groups review their information retention procedures with election officials.

D. Are voter registration groups subject to time limits for submitting the voter registration applications they have collected?

The election code requires anyone to whom a voter registration is entrusted by the applicant to mail or deliver the application "immediately."²⁷

E. What are the consequences for failing to submit voter registration applications on time?

There is no specific penalty in the election code addressing this issue; however, the state election commissioner is authorized to levy civil penalties of up to \$2000 per offense for violations of specified election code sections, including the section requiring that applications be mailed or delivered "immediately."²⁸ Connecticut law also provides that any person who, without reasonable cause, neglects to perform any of the duties required of him under the election laws that and for which neglect no other punishment is provided are subject to a fine of up to \$300, imprisonment for not more than one year, or both.²⁹



F. How are completed voter registration forms tracked?

If the registrar determines that the applicant has not properly completed the application or is not legally qualified to register, the registrar must mail a notice to the applicant indicating that the application has been rejected and must state the reason for rejection. If the registrar determines that the applicant has properly completed the application and is legally qualified to register, the notice shall indicate that the application has been accepted.³⁰

An applicant who was denied registration may appeal. Notice of an appeal must be in writing and delivered to the registrars or to the board for admission of electors. If the appeal is denied, the applicant may appeal the decision of the local registrars or board to the State Elections Enforcement Commission. This appeal must be in writing and filed within 14 days of the decision.³¹

G. Who is responsible for investigating and enforcing the state rules?

The Secretary of the State is the chief election official responsible for the coordination of state responsibilities under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, except for some complaint investigations that are the responsibility of the State Election Enforcement Commission.³² The Secretary is the Commissioner of Elections and can issue written regulations, declaratory rulings, instructions, and opinions regarding election administration, which are presumed to be correct interpretations of the law (subject to the right of appeal).³³

Connecticut also has a State Election Enforcement Commission.³⁴ The Commission can levy a civil penalty of up to \$2000 per offense against any person the commission finds to be in violation of specified portions of the election law, including the rules regarding mail registration applications.³⁵ The Commission may also refer evidence that relates to violation of the election law to the Chief State's Attorney and/or the Attorney General.³⁶ The Commission may receive complaints regarding violations of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 and issue orders to enforce it.³⁷

WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR CORRECTING INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS?

A. If a voter registration application is incomplete, may the voter registration drive write the missing information on the application with the consent of the applicant?

Connecticut election law does not address this issue.

B. How may an applicant correct an incomplete application after it has been submitted to county election officials?

If the question on U.S. citizenship is not filled in, the registrar must contact the applicant to provide an opportunity to answer this question before the application can be rejected. Applications must be rejected if the application was not signed or dated by the applicant or his agent (if applicable), if the applicant's birthdate or residence is missing, or if the application is otherwise "substantially defective." Applications may not be rejected for lack of a Social Security number or zip code.³⁸ Connecticut election law does not otherwise address this issue.

WEB PAGE OF STATUTE

http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/title_09.htm



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DISCLAIMER

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¹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-12(a)

² See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-14a

³ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-12(b)

⁴ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-159s(b)

⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-46(a)

⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-46a; Conn. Sec'y of the State, *The Ultimate Freedom: The Right To Vote-Restoration of Voting Rights of Convicted Felons*, http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/lib/sots/electionservices/hava/havapdf/the_ultimate_freedom.pdf (last visited March 10, 2014).

⁷ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-46a; Conn. Sec'y of the State, *The Ultimate Freedom: The Right To Vote-Restoration of Voting Rights of Convicted Felons*, http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/lib/sots/electionservices/hava/havapdf/the_ultimate_freedom.pdf (last visited March 10, 2014).

⁸ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-46a(b)

⁹ Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) §§ 303(a), 303(b).

¹⁰ National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), 42 U.S.C. § 1973gg-7(b)

¹¹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(e)

¹² Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(e)

¹³ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(d)(2)

¹⁴ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23a(a)

¹⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(d)(2)

¹⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-2

¹⁷ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-17(a)

¹⁸ Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 9-17(b), 9-19b(d)

¹⁹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-19k

²⁰ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-19j

²¹ 42 U.S.C. § 1973i(c).

²² *United States v. Garcia*, 719 F.2d 99, 102-103 (5th Cir. 1983).

²³ California Secretary of State, *Guide to Voter Registration Drives 10* (last revised Mar. 2013), <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/guides/guide-to-vr-drives.pdf>

²⁴ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(b)

²⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(e)

²⁶ Conn. Sec'y of State, *How to Register Voters: A Manual for Volunteers 10*, available at <http://vsv.sots.state.ct.us/ElectionsDivision/HAVA/HowToRegisterVotersEng.pdf> (last visited March 10, 2014).

²⁷ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(b) (Mail-in application for admission).

²⁸ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-7b(2)

²⁹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-355

³⁰ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(c)



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- ³¹ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-31/
 - ³² Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23k
 - ³³ Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 9-3, 9-4
 - ³⁴ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-7a
 - ³⁵ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-7b(2).
 - ³⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 9-7b(7)-(10)
 - ³⁷ Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 9-7b(a)(3)(D), 9-7b(a)(18)
 - ³⁸ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-23g(e)