



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Elections Division

## Election Advisory #20-04

Regarding Online Vote by Mail Applications and Address Changes

September 24, 2020

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In accordance with the requirements of Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020, the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office has established an online submission process for early Vote by Mail applications.

While technical instructions will be provided to you in a separate document, this Advisory is meant to provide you with information on processing ballots received from voters who have applied via the online portal, as well as information on processing duplicate Vote by Mail applications that you may receive.

### **DUPLICATE APPLICATIONS**

With the recent and ongoing influx of Vote by Mail applications, both by mail and via the online portal, it is expected that many such applications may be duplicates from voters who have already applied.

Many voters are submitting additional applications because they are not sure if they have already applied, but some voters will also be submitting additional applications in order to update the mailing address for their ballots. As such, you should be sure to closely review any duplicate applications to confirm that the mailing address for the ballot has not changed. If there are no changes, you can reject the application as a duplicate. If there are changes, you must update the mailing address for the application.

Not all voters who are updating the mailing address for their ballot will submit a second application. Voters who have previously applied for a Vote by Mail ballot may also make amendments to that application by notifying you in writing of the change.

Below, you will find additional information on handling specific types of changes to existing applications and records. These instructions apply to absentee ballot applications (AV) and early Vote by Mail applications (EV)

### **Receiving Duplicate Applications**

When you receive a new application, whether an AV or EV application, the first thing you should do is search for the voter in EV Search. This will show whether the voter already has an absentee and/or early application on file. Be sure to select the correct election date (11/3) from the drop-down.

As noted above, if the application is a duplicate and nothing has been changed, you may disregard it. If the voter has indicated a new mailing address, you should use it to update their existing application in the following manner:

- If you receive an absentee ballot application from an existing absentee voter, use the application to update their AV record.
- If you receive an early Vote by Mail application from an existing EV voter, use the application to update their EV record.
- If you receive an absentee ballot application from an existing EV voter, use the application to update their EV record. Do not create a new AV record, because then you will have to send 2 separate ballots to the voter.
- If you receive an early Vote by Mail application from an existing absentee voter, you may either use the application to update their AV record, or delete the voter's AV record and create an EV record for them. This is a matter of personal preference, but it may be easier to create an EV record for them, so you can use an EV-7 envelope.

### **Relocated Voters**

Some voters who have already applied for ballots earlier in the year will no longer be at the address where they asked you to mail their ballots. This would likely affect students who requested a ballot be mailed to them at school, but may be at home learning remotely, or other students who are now at school, but had requested the ballot be sent to them at their home address. There are also other voters who are temporarily residing at addresses other than the one where they are registered, such as second homes. Ultimately, it is the voter's responsibility to update their mailing address with you, and they can do that by amending their previous application in writing or submitting a new application.

If you are aware of who your student voters are and time allows, you may reach out to them to remind them to update their mailing addresses before ballots are mailed, if that is easier for

you. This is not required, however, it may be helpful to remind voters generally to check their voter status by reaching out to them through local newspapers and social media.

### **Address Changes – Out of Town**

When a voter registers to vote in a new city or town, any previous applications they had on file will be deleted, so they will need to submit a new Vote by Mail application to their new community if they wish to vote by mail. They may use the Vote by Mail application included with their acknowledgement notice for this purpose.

### **Address Changes in VRIS – Within Town**

When a voter moves within a city or town and updates their registration, their application will remain on file.

If the voter had previously provided a mailing address for their ballot *other than the address at which they were registered*, this address will not automatically change. The voter will need to submit an update to their application in order to update that mailing address. Like voters who move to a new town, they may use the Vote by Mail application that comes with their acknowledgement notice to update their previous application.

If the voter had applied for a ballot to be mailed to them *at the address at which they were registered*, then VRIS will print a label for their new address.

## **SIGNATURE MATCHING**

As you are aware, state laws require local election officials to examine each ballot envelope upon receipt of an absentee/early ballot. In order to be acceptable, ballot envelopes must bear a signature from the voter casting the ballot. The only exception to this requirement would be the envelope of a voter who is unable to sign the envelope due to physical disability or inability to read English, in which case the person assisting the voter must sign the voter's name and provide their own information in the "Assisting Person" section of the envelope.

Generally, local election officials are able to match the signature on the ballot envelope against the voter's signature on their ballot application. If you do not have an application bearing the voter's signature, either because they submitted their application online or because a family requested an absentee ballot on the voter's behalf, the Elections Division advises you to use the voter's most recent signature associated with their voter record on file for verifying the voter's signature.

### **Questions?**

Contact the Elections Division at [elections@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:elections@sec.state.ma.us) or 617-727-2828.