



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Elections Division

Election Advisory #26-06 Preparing for the State Primary

August 25, 2026

This Advisory will provide information about preparing for the September 1, 2026 State Primary.

Early & Absentee Voting

Vote by Mail Applications

The deadline to submit a vote by mail application (early or absentee) is **5 p.m. on Tuesday, August 25**. The completed application must be received by the deadline.

Any applications received after the deadline must be rejected and the voter must be notified their application was received too late. If the voter requests a ballot for any future elections, add them to VRIS for those elections.

- This deadline also applies to UOCAVA and Accessible Vote by Mail ballots.

This is also the deadline for a voter to return a spoiled ballot by mail and request another ballot.

Receiving Ballots

The deadline to receive all State Primary ballots is **8 p.m. on Tuesday, September 1**.

This applies to all ballots, including those returned by mail, by drop box or in-person, as well as those returned electronically or from outside the United States.

- No ballots can be accepted after the close of polls for a primary!

Ballots can be returned in person to your office or to an early voting location during voting hours.

Voters cannot return ballots directly to the polling place on Election Day, unless your office is closed and you are at the polling place to receive the ballots. If this is the case, advertise the information on the front door, outgoing voicemail, website, etc.

You must monitor your drop box(es) and empty them regularly. Someone must be present at the drop box at 8 p.m. on September 1 to collect ballots received on time.

Voters Admitted to a Healthcare Facility

A voter admitted to a healthcare facility after 12 p.m. on the 7th day before the election (August 25) can request a ballot to be hand-delivered to them by the registrars.

If the registrars are unavailable (which is common), the voter can designate someone in writing, other than a candidate, to hand-deliver the ballot to them.

- The Vote by Mail application deadline does not apply to these voters! They can request ballots up until the close of polls. However, the voter must submit an absentee ballot application and an application by a family member is NOT sufficient.

In-Person Absentee Voting

The deadline to apply for an in-person absentee ballot is **12 p.m. on Monday, August 31.**

- You can require voters to make an appointment, but if you do, please update your website with instructions on how to do so.

Voting Equipment Testing

Tabulators must be tested at least 4 days before use. If you are advance depositing ballots, the tabulators must be tested at least 4 days before advance depositing begins. Otherwise, tabulators (including spares) must be tested at least 4 days before Election Day.

Notice

Written notice of the time and place of the test must be sent to the chair of the city or town committee of each political party and posted in your office at least 3 days before the test. The testing itself must be open to the public, who can observe only.

Test Deck

A test deck must be created and tested for each political party. Each tabulator to be used at the State Primary must be tested.

The test deck **for each ballot style** must include:

- 50 Democratic ballots

- 50 Republican ballots

Mark the ballots the way voters would, including overvotes, write-ins, and blanks. Use a mix of official and EV/AV ballots and mark at least 5 with the AutoMARK.

Write “TEST” on each test ballot. If you know of a write-in candidate using a sticker, you may request a sample to use during testing.

Hand count the test ballots and record the results on a hand count tally sheet. Insert the ballots into the tabulators using all 4 orientations. The results from the tabulators should match your hand count of the test deck.

You don’t need to use separate test decks for each tabulator, if you don’t have separate ballot styles. You will have separate ballot styles if you have multiple districts for any office. You must prepare a test deck for each ballot style.

Results

Send a copy of the test deck results tape, signed and dated by the clerk, to:

Elections Division
Secretary of the Commonwealth
One Ashburton Place, Room 1705
Boston, MA 02108

- Don’t send your test ballots – just the tapes.

Staffing and Polling Place Set-Up

Election Officers

Each precinct should have a warden, clerk, and 4 inspectors, if using a check-out table. A check-out table is not required, but strongly recommended. Even if eliminating the check-out table, you must still have someone supervise the ballot box or tabulator.

Two inspectors must be assigned to the check-in table and two to the check-out table (if used). If you have multiple precincts in one polling place, they can share a warden.

Each polling place must also have either a police officer or constable.

Polling Place Set-Up

Each precinct must have a check-in table, a guardrail, voting booths, ballot box, and AutoMARK.

You must post at least 3 specimen ballots for each party and 3 tri-fold posters (including instructions, penalties, and the Voter's Bill of Rights). At least one set of specimen ballots and posters must be posted no higher than 48 inches from the ground.