

West Bloomfield Township Clerk Debbie Binder

- What do voters need to know to ensure their vote will count?
Registering to vote, requesting an absentee ballot, completing and returning the ballot.

Registered Michigan voters have 2 options for casting their ballot. They may vote by absentee ballot or vote at their precinct's polling location on Election Day.

For the large and increasing number of voters choosing to exercise their right to vote by absentee ballot, the most important things to ensure a voter's absentee ballot is counted is to remind voters they need to remember to sign the outer envelope of their ballot then return it on time, to the correct municipality whether by mail, drop box, or in –person delivery.

Why are some ballots rejected? With the expected increase in absent voter ballots, is your office prepared to reach out to voters to inform them if there is a problem with their ballot, such as a signature not matching or failing to sign the envelope?

The most likely reasons a ballot would be rejected would be if the signature was missing or the signature didn't match. When we receive a ballot where the signature is an issue we make every attempt to contact the voter using all of the information we have available. One bit of information that has come up repeatedly is what signature we are matching the signature to. The State Qualified Voter File typically references a voter's signature on their Driver's License or State ID card, not their voter registration card signed when they were 18. The other issue which would lead to a rejected ballot would be arriving late. The best way to avoid this is to make a plan to return your ballot early, allowing us time to contact you if there is any issue.

- There is a concern there will be delays in mail delivery, possibly affecting the results of the November election since absentee ballots must be received by Election Day. How can a person check to be sure the ballot was received? If it was not received, what are the options?

The good news is the mail service has been much better since the August Primary. It has been just under 2 weeks since we mailed our absentee ballots and we already have over 34% returned. A voter can track the sending and receipt of their absentee ballot application as well as their absentee ballot at Michigan.gov/vote. If they don't get their absentee ballot in a reasonable time period, they can contact the Clerk's Office about options to spoil or reject the ballot they were issued and request a new ballot.

- **What should I do if my ballot doesn't arrive soon? What if I make a mistake on my ballot, what should I do? Can I change my mind, and vote in person AFTER mailing in my ballot?**

If you wish to change your ballot or make a mistake, you can request to spoil or reject the ballot you were issued and receive a new one up to 10 am on November 2nd. This is an important change in law. If you wish to request to spoil or reject your ballot by mail, the deadline is 5 pm on Friday, October 31. Saturday from 8 to 4 and Monday morning from 8 to 10 must be done in-person at the Clerk's Office.

If you do change your mind and wish to vote in the poll instead, we recommend you bring the ballot you were issued with you. The Election Inspector will check the Electronic Poll Book to see if your ballot was sent and received. If the Electronic Poll Book says it has not been received at the Clerk's Office, a Chairperson will contact the Clerk's Office to confirm and we will spoil or reject the ballot you were issued. If you don't have your ballot to surrender, you would have to sign an affidavit. You would then be allowed to vote in the polls.

- **What is the process for collecting, processing, and counting absentee ballots? What is done to make this process secure?**

When a ballot is returned to the Clerk's Office, it is checked into the State of Michigan Qualified Voter File which allows voters to track their absentee ballots and confirm that their Clerk's Office received it. After it is received,

the application for that ballot is pulled and the signature is compared to the signature on the ballot, ensuring one voter to one ballot. Once the ballot is processed and accounted for, the ballots are delivered to the Absent Voter Counting Board for tabulation. The Counting Board MUST account for every ballot received according to the Qualified Voter File.

The absent voter counting board is made up of precinct teams where 3 people process the ballots. The processing teams are designed with representation of 2 major political parties and the ballots are processed in a way that the person who sees your name never sees your ballot and the person who sees your ballot never sees your name, ensuring a voter's right to a secret ballot.

- **Is it safe to vote at the polling locations? What plans are in place to protect poll workers and voters from COVID-19? How are polling places monitored? What is being done to make sure the voter doesn't feel intimidated at the polling location?**

We plan an election with precautions in mind and COVID-19 has definitely added an additional layer. Each voter has to determine their comfort level in going to the polls and every voter has the right to vote by absentee ballot if they are uncomfortable. We want to make sure we protect our Election Inspectors so we plan including donations from the State and County to ensure each precinct and the AVCB has masks, shields, goggles, gloved, and copious amounts of hand sanitizer in each location. We also work to limit the number of people in the polling location at a given time so they can monitor social distancing. Our police chief will increase patrol on Election Day but not deploy an officer at each polling location. We did deploy an officer to our faith based polling locations in an election immediately after the synagogue shooting in Pennsylvania at the risk of losing our polling locations. For each person that was comforted by the presence of a police officer, there was another person who was intimidated so we just increase patrol. An additional step we undertake is to have our police chief, Chief Patton speak with our Chairpeople during training, reviewing strategies for de-escalation and situational awareness and reassuring the workers that he would rather respond to 99 false alarms than miss a real incident.

- What challenges do you face leading up to and on Election Day?

Running an election is a challenging process, running an election with historic numbers is even more challenging, running an election with historic numbers in the midst of a global pandemic adds an additional layer of challenge. For West Bloomfield, the historic numbers and the reality that we have a 2 sheet ballot in all of our precincts will present a challenge to process. We are preparing and staffing to get the job done as quickly as possible but I don't anticipate West Bloomfield will be on the early end of reporting.