

## Wayne County Voter Academy: Absentee and Provisional Voting

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Questions and Answers – August 20, 2024

*These are the questions that were submitted from our August 20<sup>th</sup> Voter Academy class. A few of the submitted questions asked about subjects that were not relevant to the topics covered in this class, and those have been omitted. If you asked a question that is not listed here, please contact Bryon at [bbell@wayne.boe.ohio.gov](mailto:bbell@wayne.boe.ohio.gov) or 330-287-5484 for an answer to your question.*

### **Where are public Board of Elections meetings posted and held so the public can know about them and attend? Also, are there videos recorded, and if so, where are the videos available?**

Wayne County Board of Elections meetings are held in the Metzler Room at our offices, 200 Vanover Street in Wooster. The [meeting calendar](#) is available on our website at [www.WayneCountyOH.gov](http://www.WayneCountyOH.gov) and physically posted at the entrance to our office.

The meetings are not recorded, but the minutes from each meeting are available by contacting our office.

### **Can a person challenge the decision if the Board determines a voter is not eligible to cast a vote?**

The Board's decision on the eligibility of a provisional ballot is final, but anyone casting a provisional ballot has four days after the election to contact us to provide any needed information (like valid photo ID) to allow their ballot to be counted. The Board does not rule on provisional ballots until after the 4-day cure period is over, and when they do make these eligibility decisions it is done in a public meeting that anyone may attend.

### **Are we able to volunteer in a non-pay fashion to help the Wayne County Board of Elections in any way with the handling of the massive amounts of Wayne County ballots after election day?**

We typically pay all of our seasonal election help, but there may be special circumstances where volunteer labor can be used. Most of the need is in the buildup to the election as most post-election activities have to be done by permanent BOE staff. If you're interested in learning how you can help, please call Shannon Pritt at 330-287-5480, Option 6, or email [spritt@wayne.boe.ohio.gov](mailto:spritt@wayne.boe.ohio.gov).

### **Why was an absentee ballot sent to me if I did not request one?**

Absentee ballots are never sent without a valid request form first being received and validated. However, the Ohio Secretary of State does send out absentee ballot request forms in every even-numbered year, and other organizations and political parties may send the applications out every year. Many people receive these applications and call us with concerns, and sometime they are confused for ballots. I suspect that most Ohio voters will receive more than

one request form this year from various sources. While the incomplete forms can be distributed by anyone, they have to come to the Board of Elections to be processed, and every request is rigorously checked in a bipartisan fashion before a ballot can be issued. *While this question was submitted anonymously, I'd like to ask the person who submitted it to call me so I can look into the details of your voter record and confirm when absentee ballots were requested, sent, and received.*

**What happens if I request an absentee ballot but do not use it and go to vote in person on election day, and they say I already voted and did not?**

When you request an absentee ballot, your listing in the poll book is changed to indicate that an absentee ballot has been requested. If you appear at the polling place on election day, the poll workers will see this and you will be required to cast a provisional ballot. This is done so that no one can cast two ballots. Once your provisional ballot is returned to the Board of Elections, we'll check to make sure your absentee ballot was never received. The provisional is only ruled eligible and counted once it's confirmed that the absentee ballot was not returned.

**How and where do college students vote if they are living on campus during school?**

With the recent changes in voter ID requirements, some college students no longer have the required photo ID to vote in-person (particularly those who reside outside of Ohio when not at school). For those students, requesting an absentee ballot by mail is likely their best option. For those college students attending college here in Wayne County that do have an Ohio ID, military ID, or US Passport, they can vote absentee, early in-person, or on election day in the precinct where they live while here in Wayne County. Also, college students can always remain registered at home, and request an absentee ballot be sent to them at school from their home county/state.

**The absentee ballot application shown includes boxes for Republican, Democratic, or Issues Only. I assume this is a primary application? If not, it shouldn't have these designations.**

The same form is used for all elections, primary, special, and general. You are correct in that party is only needed for a primary ballot. The form first asked which election they are requesting, then says "If a primary election is selected, indicate the type of ballot you would like to receive by selecting ONE of the following: Democratic, Republican, Issues Only." If someone checks a party for a special or general election, we disregard that information. It doesn't invalidate the request.

**Why can't independents be considered in verifications as bipartisan?**

Ohio law doesn't recognize "independent" as a political affiliation. There are only non-affiliated voters who have not participated in a partisan primary election in the past two years. Ideally, a

bipartisan team consists of a Democrat and a Republican, but we can use non-affiliated voters in some circumstances.

**Regarding absentee ballots returned through the post office, does the post office make an effort to ensure the returned ballot envelope has a legible postmark?**

We recently met with the Wooster Postmaster and the USPS Regional Customer Relations Manager to discuss this very question. They confirmed that, yes, they make special efforts to ensure ballots are properly postmarked. Of course, sometimes that gets missed. If the ballot arrives after election day and we need to verify the mailing date without a postmark, we have another way to determine when it was mailed. On the back of most pieces of mail, the sorting equipment at the USPS prints a unique hard-to-see barcode in fluorescent orange ink. We have a special ultra-violet scanner here at the Board of Elections that can read and decode this barcode and determine when the mail piece was processed. This allows us to validate ballots that were mailed on time but not postmarked through no fault of the voter.

**Are some nursing home polling places so that residents who can vote “normally” can do so, without assistance?**

In the past, some polling places in Wayne County were at nursing homes. In 2020, due to health concerns arising from the pandemic, the Secretary of State issued a directive that prevents us from having polling locations in nursing homes, retirement centers, or other congregant living facilities to protect the health of the residents.

***The following questions all cover similar ground, so I'll answer them together:***

**Maybe I missed this, but for a UOCAVA ballot – can it be returned as an electronic submission, but it still needs to be followed up with a physical ballot returned? And does this physical ballot need to be returned by a certain date?**

**Can UOCAVA ballots be faxed back which would result in a hard copy?**

**What happens if electronic ballot differs from the physical ballot returned from overseas, etc. What if the physical ballot proves to be ineligible when received? Is the electronic ballot removed from the results?**

It's important to remember that, while a UOCAVA voter can request to receive their ballot electronically, they **must** return a physical ballot. There is no method under Ohio law to return a ballot electronically. Ballots cannot be returned by fax. The only legally acceptable ways to return a ballot are by mail, via the drop box, or by hand delivering it to the Board of Elections.

Several questions asked about the quantity of Provisionals in past elections and the reasons they were accepted or rejected. I'll answer them together by providing details about provisional voting in General 2020, General 2022, and General 2023:

	General 2020	General 2022	General 2023
Total Votes Cast	54,848	39,126	38,131
Total # of Provisionals Cast	976	591	515
Provisionals as % of Total Votes	1.8%	1.5%	1.4%
Percentage of Provisionals Accepted	86%	88%	73%
Percentage of Provisionals Rejected	14%	12%	27%

<b>Accepted Provisional Ballots</b>			
Requested Absentee but did not return	220	75	20
In County Address Change	370	245	152
Out of County Address Change	119	106	113
Name Change	67	39	23
No Discernable Reason	54	13	11
No ID at Polls- CURED	0	25	9
Returned Acknowledgement Notice	0		11
Religious Objection 12-O, Confirmed	0		18
Name Change AND In County Move	0	8	11
Wrong Precinct, Correct Polling Place	5		0
Board Ruled Countable	0	8	6
<b>Total Accepted</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>374</b>

<b>Rejected Provisional Ballots</b>			
Absentee Ballot Counted	10	1	1
Do not reside in Wayne County	3	0	0
No ID/Signature	7	8	45
Not Registered in the Ohio	76	51	74
Wrong Precinct & Wrong Polling Place	29	11	14
No ID Envelope	4	0	0
ID does not match VR system	0	0	2
Missing Information	9	0	0
Missing DOB	0	0	1
Failed to Provide Address	0	1	1
Non-Matching Signature	0	0	2
Board Ruled Uncountable	0	0	1
Vote cast and counted on Machine	2	0	0
Commercial Address	1	0	0
<b>Total Rejected</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>141</b>

**In the 2020 Presidential Election, how many ballots in Wayne County were deemed “fraudulent” or ineligible?**

As you can see on the previous page, 141 provisional ballots were rejected in General 2020. There were no ballots determined to be fraudulent in that election. A provisional ballot being rejected for failure to meet all legal requirements does not equal fraud.

**What happened to the rejected provisional votes? Are they opened?**

No, rejected provisional ballots are not opened. They remain sealed inside the provisional envelope. If the voter meets all eligibility criteria, the provisional form is processed as a voter registration form so that the voter may be eligible to cast a regular ballot in the next election.

**Regarding nursing home voters, could the family take care of the ballot at the nursing home or is it required that a bipartisan team verify and assist to ensure that the resident’s ballot is not compromised?**

If the ballot is delivered by poll workers to the nursing home, they will assist the voter as needed. If the voter wishes to have a family member’s assistance, they may do so by submitting a ballot request with the family member’s mailing address. The family member would then be responsible for bringing the ballot to the nursing home and see that it is properly returned to the Board of Elections.

**What happens when the board is tied when approving a questionable provisional ballot?**

Provisional ballot questions rarely result in tie votes as the criteria under law are quite clear. Here in Wayne County, tie votes are exceedingly rare, as our board members work diligently to set aside any partisan positions and focus on building consensus and fairly administering election law. Of course, not every board always agrees, and tie votes can and do occur. Ohio law provides a mechanism for resolving these ties. The question is submitted to the Secretary of State, who has the authority to break ties. These tie-breaking decisions are available to the public, and you can read them here: <https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/elections-officials/rules/#tie>.

**Although sending an absentee ballot is something you must consciously request, I believe Ohio or perhaps Wayne County sends out a reminder. Is that a courtesy or required by law?**

It is not required by law; however, the Secretary of State customarily asks for and receives funding to send absentee ballot requests to every voter in advance of general elections in even-numbered years. Many private organizations, political parties, and campaigns also send out absentee ballot requests or reminders as well.

### **How often are mistakes caught when verifying the outgoing ballots?**

This isn't a statistic that we track. It's rare, but elections are human endeavors, and humans make mistakes. That's why we have so many redundant processes and checkpoints before the ballot is actually mailed. We know just how important that it is to "get it right," and we take the time and extra steps to double- and triple-check each application and ballot multiple times before they are sent. If a mistake is discovered at any step along the process, it is immediately corrected and re-verified before the processing of that application or ballot continues.

### **Did I hear that any Wayne County voter may voter provisionally at the Board of Elections?**

A voter who needs to cast a provisional ballot may do so at the Board of Elections office when early voting is underway and on election day.

### **Digital Ohio ID is now available. Will this be an option at the polls to prove ID?**

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, Ohio began issuing digital IDs (currently only available in Apple Wallet). These IDs are not valid for voting purposes. To be valid for voting, the voter must present their physical ID. The only digital ID acceptable for voting in Ohio is the Veteran ID issued by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In September of 2022, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs discontinued issuing physical Veteran ID Cards and now issues only digital VICs. Precinct election officials must accept the digital VIC if the voter presents it.

### **Ballots from Wooster go to Cleveland to for processing. If I mail back from Wooster to the BOE, does my completed ballot go to Cleveland as well?**

Yes. We're told that it is the postal service's policy to route all mail (not just ballots) through its regional processing centers. Throughout this process there are special procedures in place to recognize ballots and give them priority processing through all parts of the mail stream. Voters who have concerns about mail delivery times are welcome to bring their ballot in person to the Board of Elections or deposit it in the secure drop box in front of our office.

### **How long is video recording of drop boxes kept? Who has access to those camera recordings both live and to look at after recorded?**

Wayne County's secure drop box is under 24/7 video surveillance. Board of Elections staff can view this video live, but the live video is not streamed publicly. These recordings are maintained for at least two weeks, and are available for inspection upon request in accordance with public record law, [R.C. 149.43](#). You can read more about this policy in Chapter 7 of the [Ohio Election Official Manual](#) beginning on page 202.

**What happens if accepted provisional ballots put a different candidate as winner, even though another candidate has already been announced as winner?**

Accepted provisional ballots are ruled upon, opened, and counted at the same time as timely absentee ballots that arrive after election day but before the deadline. They are included in the official results of the election. In a close race, it is certainly possible for these timely absentee and provisional votes to change the outcome of a race from the unofficial results released election night. It's important to remember that the outcome of any election is not official until the certification and release of the official results, even if a candidate, campaign, or media outlet declare otherwise. Official results are always posted promptly on the Board of Elections' website as soon as they are certified (usually 2-3 weeks after the date of the election).

**Regarding absentee voting during the revolutionary war, what were they voting on (if known)?**

What a question! While I'm no more than an amateur historian, I'll give it a go. Elections in colonial and revolutionary America were, much like today, used to elect leaders - Colonial Governors, representatives to legislative bodies, and the like. For an overview of this topic, [click here to read Voting and Elections in Early America from Google Arts and Culture](#).