

Connecticut Public Act 26-42

Formerly known as House Bill 5001

Policy Analysis & Fact Sheet



After more than a decade of sustained advocacy with community organizers and partner organizations to modernize Connecticut's voting system and make participation more accessible, Connecticut Public Act 26-42, signed into law on May 19, 2026, **expands access to mail-in voting for all Connecticut voters.** You can learn more about mail-in voting at planyourvotect.org and the Secretary of the State's (SOTS) website.

What does this new law do?

1. It expands voting by mail to all Connecticut voters.

The law **removes “excuses” that were formerly required to apply for and vote by mail in Connecticut.** Now, any voter who wants to vote by mail can do so. This is especially important at a time when the federal government is increasingly engaging in aggressive tactics to restrict voters' access to their ballot. SOTS must create and conduct a statewide mailing to inform voters across Connecticut about these changes to our mail-in voting, also known as absentee voting.

2. It creates clarity and safeguards around the mail-in voting process and materials.

The law **changes how mail-in ballots are prepared and returned to make the process easier to use and more secure.** This is critical for voters to have trust in the mail-in voting system, knowing that mail-in voting is just another option to cast your ballot in a safe, secure, and convenient way.

◦ What this means:

- Your ballot now comes with a privacy sleeve and a single return envelope. This makes the process easier and helps reduce common mistakes.
- The return envelope now includes more helpful information to guide you through the process.
- Every mail-in ballot has its own tracking number, making it easier to track your ballot as it moves through the voting process.
- If federal law requires you to mail a copy of your identification, your town clerk will provide a pre-addressed envelope for you.
- The SOTS may include additional nonpartisan voting information with your mail-in ballot materials. This information cannot support or oppose any ballot question.

3. It clarifies the process of distribution and return of mail-in ballots.

The law **addresses confusion about the former absentee ballot process, making the rules for distributing and returning mail-in ballots clear.**

◦ What this means:

- A mail-in or absentee ballot is considered “cast” when it is (1) received, (2) signed by the voter on the return envelope, and (3) accepted by the town clerk. Voters can no longer withdraw a mail-in ballot after returning it.
- Clerks must collect ballots from drop boxes on each business day instead of weekday.
- Candidates, parties, or political committees that mail unsolicited mail-in applications to voters must include (1) a written disclaimer that the individual or committee paid for the mailing or delivery, and if paid for by a candidate, that the candidate approved the mailing, and (2) an explanation of the options for returning completed mail-in ballots under state law.

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What does this new law do? [cont.]

4. It establishes procedures to ensure that voters can track their ballot and fix it if there are errors made on their ballots.

The law **requires SOTS to develop a tracking software for mail-in ballots while also updating procedures for ballot curing**, which is the process of checking and fixing small mistakes on submitted ballots. This is a critical part of the mail-in voting process as, in the past, hundreds of thousands of mail-in ballots have been rejected and left uncounted due to minor errors like a missing signature on one of two envelopes.

◦ **What this means:**

- SOTS, along with town clerks, must update ballot curing procedures to create a process for ballot curing if a signature on the return envelope is missing.
 - Voters are now able to cure or fix ballots from the beginning of the mail-in or absentee voting period until the close of the polls on election day.
 - Town clerks must make their best efforts to contact a voter who failed to sign the envelope, generally within 24 hours after receiving the voter's ballot.
 - "Best efforts" is seen as contact by phone and email provided on the mail-in or absentee ballot application and voter registration. If not provided, the clerk may use discretion in contacting the voter through other means.
- SOTS must create a ballot tracking system integrated with the state's existing centralized voter registration system ("CVRS").
 - Software must track at minimum:
 - When a mail-in application is received and accepted by the town clerk.
 - When the ballot is mailed out by the clerk, delivered to the applicant, or delivered to the clerk.
 - Whether the ballot was accepted, needs to be cured, or was rejected.

5. It allows voters to automatically receive an application for a mail-in ballot for each election, primary, or referendum.

Beginning July 1, 2026, the law **allows voters to submit requests to local registrars, through procedures set by SOTS, to automatically receive mail-in ballot applications for each election, primary, or referendum.**

◦ **What this means:**

- All approved applicants must be issued an application as soon as practicable before an election.
- Approved voters continue receiving applications automatically until they
 - (1) submit a written request for removal to the registrars or
 - (2) are removed under current state law because:
 - they are removed from the municipality's official voter registry list
 - the application is returned undeliverable.
 - they become an "inactive voter" because they:
 - filed a change of address form to the postal service indicating they moved out of state
 - registered to vote in another state; or
 - election officials receive information from the statewide centralized voter system that the voter moved out of state.

What does this new law do? [cont.]

6. It prohibits state and federal law enforcement from engaging in certain conduct at polling locations.

The law **establishes safeguards around state and federal officers and agents from engaging in certain conduct while knowingly being within 250 feet of an election site.** This is meant to protect voters from voter intimidation and reduce misconduct in a time when we are witnessing federal agents abuse their power to cause harm in our communities.

- **What this means:**

- Officers and agents authorized by any state or federal government to use force against, search, detain, or arrest people, and those who supervise or direct them, are banned from knowingly being within 250 feet of any election site.
 - “Election site” includes: (1) polling places on day of election, primary, referendum; (2) early voting locations; (3) same-day election registration locations on election day or during the early voting period; (4) central ballot counting locations; (5) recanvass locations; (6) drop boxes during the mail-in voting period
- Officers are banned from engaging in conduct that would violate federal laws prohibiting (1) stationing military forces at locations where elections are being held; (2) military forces from interfering with elections, and (3) government employees from interfering with elections for federal offices.
- Such officers and agents are also prohibited from (1) attempting to examine a person’s qualifications to vote while knowingly within 250 feet of an election site or (2) loitering or remaining within the perimeter.
- Any person wearing a mask or covering that obscures their face, head, or identity is prohibited from being within 250 feet of elections site unless (1) medically necessary or of religious significance or (2) reasonable given the weather conditions if the person complies with a moderator’s request to remove the mask or covering.

Additional Notable Items from P.A. 26-42:

- **Expands Mail-In Voting Applications for Voters Who Are Incarcerated**

- The law requires Department of Correction (DOC) employees who assist incarcerated voters with mail-in ballots to provide the name of the facility where they work and the assistance they provided, rather than their personal information. This improves the process of applying for a mail-in ballot while incarcerated for eligible voters.

- **Advances and Modernizes Elections Security and Protections**

- The law expands certain powers of state offices, including the SOTS, the Attorney General (AG), and the CT State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC), to strengthen election security and protections, and to act when election laws are violated.

- **What this means:**

- SEEC has authority to investigate and enforce regulations under HB 5001.
- State officials must be notified when a municipal official or election worker received an election-related subpoena, warrant, or other request from a private individual, government agency, or public office.
- AG can seek equitable relief (a court order to “stop doing something” rather than money), including injunctions, to prevent or stop interference in elections for presidential and congressional offices.

Additional Notable Items from P.A. 26-42: [cont.]

- AG's authority is expanded to investigate, intervene in, and take certain actions when a policy deprives or interferes with another person's civil rights.
 - This clarifies that interfering, or attempting to, another person's civil rights includes doing so through physical obstruction.
- Election workers, including assistant municipal clerks, are protected from harassment.
- Election tabulators and their parts may not be shared with unauthorized third parties.
- Tampering with absentee ballot, or mail-in ballot, drop boxes is prohibited.

This law is lengthy and highly technical. It covers many other changes that tighten election laws that are not summarized here. These changes address topics like voter registration, mail voter registration applications, political party rules, investigations into complaints regarding town clerks, and more.

If you want to dive into the full language of this new law, visit the [Connecticut General Assembly website](https://www.cga.ct.gov/2026/ACT/PA/PDF/2026PA-00042-R00HB-05001-PA.PDF), or www.cga.ct.gov/2026/ACT/PA/PDF/2026PA-00042-R00HB-05001-PA.PDF.

If you want to incorporate the changes from this new law into your plan to vote, visit planyourvotect.org.