



CLIENT SERVICES & POLICY DIVISION

Legal Assistance Office



Voting Overseas

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about absentee voting:

What is *UOCAVA*?

The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* extends federal absentee voting rights to Service members, their eligible family members, and overseas citizens.

Who is covered under *UOCAVA*?

UOCAVA covers U.S. citizens who are 18 or older AND active duty members of the Uniformed Services, Merchant Marine, or commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; their eligible family members; and U.S. citizens residing outside the United States.

What is the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)?

UOCAVA citizens can use the FPCA to register to vote and request an absentee ballot simultaneously. They can also use the FPCA to update their contact information.

What is the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)?

The FWAB is an emergency backup ballot for *UOCAVA* citizens who did not receive an absentee ballot from their state in time to participate in the election.

Do I have to register to vote?

Most states and territories require you to register to vote. Fill out an FPCA to register and request an absentee ballot at the same time.

When should I request an absentee ballot?

You should send in a new FPCA every January and each time you move. We recommend that you send in an FPCA at least 90 days before the election in which you want to vote.

Do I have to send in a separate application for each election?

The FPCA allows you to request an absentee ballot for all federal elections in the calendar year. Depending on your state, you may receive a ballot with local or state offices and initiatives as well (e.g., Governor, City Council). We recommend that you send in a new FPCA every January and each time you move.

Can I vote at the embassy or consulate?

No. Elections are run at the state level. You must communicate directly with your state to register, request a ballot, and vote. Most embassies and consulates will help you to fill out the FPCA and FWAB, but they are not polling places.

When will I get my ballot?

Election offices are required to send absentee ballots at least 45 days before a federal election. If you requested your ballot by email, then the ballot should arrive right away. Mailed ballots will take longer to arrive depending on the postal system in the country where you are located.

What if I do not get a ballot?

If you do not receive an absentee ballot in time to return it to your state, you can use the FWAB as a backup ballot to vote for federal offices. If your official absentee ballot arrives after you send in the FWAB, then you can fill out and send in the official ballot as well. Your state will count only one.

Do I have to choose a classification?

Yes. This is how you tell the election office that you are eligible to vote absentee under *UOCAVA*.

What if none of these classifications apply to me?

Military Members: If you are an active duty military member (or family member) stationed within your voting jurisdiction, you are not covered under *UOCAVA* and should follow your state's regular voting procedures. You can use either the National Mail Voter Registration Form (NVRF) or your state's voter registration form.

Non-Military: If you do not reside outside of the United States but want to vote absentee, you must follow the standard absentee voting procedures for your state. You can look up your election office at <https://www.fvap.gov/search-offices> and contact them about obtaining an absentee ballot.

Can my immediate family members vote absentee?

Spouses and children who live away from their voting residence can request an absentee ballot using the FPCA. However, if they currently live where they are registered to vote, then they are not covered by *UOCAVA* and should vote at the local polls, or request an absentee ballot according to state guidelines.

I am the spouse of a Service member. Can I use the same residence or domicile as my Service member for my voting residence address?

Yes, you are allowed to retain the same residence or domicile that your Service member has established, even if you have not physically been present at that address. If you choose, you may instead elect to retain your established residency or domicile (if different from your sponsor).

You are not permitted to choose any state; you or your service member must have established residency in a state. Ways to do this may include voting, paying taxes, owning property, holding a driver's license, and registering a vehicle. Residency requirements vary by state. Please consult legal counsel to discuss tax implications and other effects of the Military Spouse Residency Relief Act (MSRRA).

Will it affect my citizenship if I select "my return is uncertain"?

No.

Can a U.S. citizen who has never lived in the country register to vote and request an absentee ballot?

Some states allow citizens who have never resided in the U.S. to use a parent's voting residence as their own. A list of these states is available online at <https://www.fvap.gov/citizen-voter/reside>.

What if I don't have a social security number or a state-issued ID?

In Section 6 of the form, under "Additional Information," write that you do not have a Social Security Number or a state-issued ID.

Does voter registration affect my tax status?

You can vote for federal offices without a change to your tax status, but voting for non-federal offices may result in state and local taxation. There may also be tax implications when changing your residence from one state to another. We recommend that you seek legal advice when changing your voting residence.

What is my U.S. voting residence address?

Your U.S. voting residence address is used to determine where you are eligible to vote. For military voters, it is usually the last address you lived at in your state of legal residence. For overseas citizens, it is usually the last place you lived at in the U.S. before moving overseas. You do not need to have any current ties with this address.

What if someone else lives there now or the house was torn down?

Your election office only uses your voting residence address to determine if you are eligible to vote in that jurisdiction and which ballot to send you. Your election office will not send any voting materials to this address.

What if I do not know my voting residence address?

If you cannot remember the U.S. address where you last resided, we recommend asking family members and checking old records. Your election office may also be able to help you further.

Can my voting residence and current address be the same?

No. In order to vote absentee, you must be living outside of your voting district.

Do I have to give my current address if I am asking for my absentee ballot by email or fax?

Yes. The election office needs your current address to confirm that you are eligible to vote absentee under *UOCAVA*. This is especially important for citizens residing outside of the U.S.

What if I don't know my overseas address or duty station?

If you do not know your overseas address or duty station, provide as much information as you can regarding your overseas address or duty station (e.g., country, city, etc.) in Section 3 of the FPCA and the FWAB. Use Section 6 of the forms to explain why you do not have an address overseas yet. Make sure you provide your email and phone number so the election office can contact you with any follow-up questions.

Do I have to put my political party?

Most states require you to specify a political party in order to vote in primary elections. This information may be used to register you with a party.

Do I have to give additional information?

Some states require additional information to process your application. Go to FVAP.gov to find out what your state specifically requires.

Can I sign my FPCA or FWAB electronically?

Only the states of Nevada and Montana currently accept electronic signatures from the DoD Common Access Card. All overseas citizens and military voters in all other states must print the form, sign it and send it to your election office.

Does it matter what size paper I use?

No. Any paper size is acceptable as long as the information is legible.

How can I send my form?

All states will accept your form by mail, but they vary on email and fax. Check your state's requirements/guidelines at FVAP.gov.

Do I have to pay for postage?

You must pay for postage only if you are using a foreign postal service or a commercial courier service. If you are using U.S. mail including APO/FPO and diplomatic pouches, then you can use the postage-paid template available on FVAP.gov.

Can I use any envelope to mail my form?

Yes. Print the postage-paid template from FVAP.gov onto any available blank envelope. Please note that some states require you to place ballots and FWABs inside an anonymous security/secret envelope. When sending your voting materials, make sure you have two envelopes; one for the ballot or FWAB and one for actual mailing. Place the security envelope along with the other balloting materials inside the mailing envelope. Once this is complete, you can address and send your voting materials to your election office.

What is a postmark?

A postmark is an official imprint applied on the address side of a stamped piece of mail by the post office. It shows when and where the post office accepted your mail.

How do I email my form?

Only email your form if your state will accept it this way. After printing and signing your form, scan and attach it to an email addressed to your election office. Do NOT send your form to FVAP.

What is the DoD Fax Service?

The DoD Fax Service is for those voters who cannot send their election materials directly to their election officials. To fax your election materials, use the FVAP Transmission Cover Sheet and fax to: (703) 693-5527, DSN 223-5527 or toll-free from the U.S., Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to 1-800-368-8683. If you need to send your election materials to your election official by fax but do not have access to a fax machine, you can email them to fax@fvap.gov and FVAP will fax your election materials for you. **This service is fax only.** If your state accepts your election materials by email, you should email them directly to your election official. FVAP will not transmit email-to-email transactions.

How do I check the status of my application?

Contact your election office directly to confirm that your form was processed successfully. FVAP does not have access to your registration information.

Additional information can be obtained from your unit's Voting Assistance Officer or the following website: <https://www.fvap.gov/>