



**128 DORRANCE STREET, SUITE 220 - PROVIDENCE, RI 02903
(P) (401) 831-7171 (F) (401) 831-7175 www.riaclu.org**

2008 Rhode Island Voter Empowerment Card

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a nationwide, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than 500,000 members dedicated to defending the principles of liberty and equality embodied in the Constitution and our nation's civil rights laws. The ACLU doesn't endorse or oppose any candidate or party, but we believe that no civil right is more important in our democracy than the right to vote.

This card is designed to help you protect your own right to vote. Keep it handy, and take it with you to the polls on Election Day.

WHO CAN VOTE

Can I vote in Rhode Island?

- You can vote in the November 4 election if you're registered to vote by 4 p.m. on Saturday October 4, 2008.
- You can register if you meet **all** of the following qualifications: (1) you're a U.S. citizen; (2) you'll be at least 18 years old on Election Day; (3) you're a resident of Rhode Island; (4) you're not incarcerated for a felony conviction; and (5) you haven't been legally declared mentally incapable by a court.

What if I'm a student?

- You can register to vote at whatever address you regard as your primary legal residence. This can be your address while at school or your home address.

What if I've been convicted of a crime?

- If you were convicted of a misdemeanor in Rhode Island, you can vote, but you have to vote by absentee ballot if you're still incarcerated.

- If you were convicted of a felony in a state or federal court, you can vote if you're not currently incarcerated.

What if I'm homeless?

- You don't need a home to register, but you do have to identify a place of residence (which can be a street corner, a park, a shelter, or any other place where you usually stay). You'll also need to give a mailing address, which can be the address of a local advocacy organization, shelter, or outreach center, or anyone else willing to accept mail for you.

REGISTRATION

How do I register?

- You can register to vote:
 - (1) **in person**, by filling out a voter registration form at your local board of canvassers in your city hall or town hall;
 - (2) **by mail**, by filling out a mail-in voter registration form and mailing it to your local board of canvassers or State Board of Elections; or
 - (3) **when you apply for services** at the Division of Motor Vehicles, state agencies that provide public assistance (such as Medicaid, WIC, and food stamps) or services to people with disabilities, and armed forces recruitment offices. You may also be able to register at many other state and federal offices and agencies. A complete list is available from the State Board of Elections.
- You can get mail-in voter registration forms from places such as your local board of canvassers, some public libraries, offices of city and town clerks, or online at <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/elections> and clicking on "forms and applications."

What's the registration deadline?

- 4 p.m. on Saturday, October 4.

What if I miss the deadline?

- You can still register and cast a vote for president and vice-president at your city or town hall on Election Day.

What if I've moved or changed my name?

- You have to complete a new registration form every time you move or change your name.

- If you moved to a new voting district (precinct) within your city or town on or before Sunday, October 5, and didn't complete a new registration form, you can vote a full ballot at your city or town hall or the polling place for your new address.
- If you moved to a new voting district (precinct) within your city or town after October 5, you can vote a full ballot at your city or town hall or the polling place for your old address.
- If you moved to a new city or town within the state on or before October 5 and didn't re-register, you may still be able to vote on a special paper ballot. Contact your local board of canvassers for more information.
- If you moved to a new city or town within the state after October 5, you can still vote in your old city or town.
- If you moved to Rhode Island from another state and didn't register before the deadline, contact your local board of canvassers before Election Day to find out where to vote.

How do I know if I'm registered?

- You can check your registration status online at <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/vic/>, or by calling your local board of canvassers.

VOTING EARLY BY MAIL

Can I vote before Election Day?

- Maybe. You can vote by mail before Election Day if you're registered to vote and you can't make it to the polls for at least one of several reasons, including absence, illness, disability, hospitalization or residence in a nursing home or health care facility, detainment or incarceration (except for a felony conviction), and military service. You can call the Voter Information Hotline at 1-877-GO2-VOTE to find out if you qualify to vote by mail.
- You can get an emergency mail ballot if you qualify for a mail ballot on or after October 15.

How do I get a mail ballot?

- You first have to submit an application for a mail ballot. You can get an application at your local board of canvassers or you can download one at <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/> and click on "election 2008" on the left.

- Your completed application must be received by your local board of canvassers no later than 4 p.m. on Tuesday, October 14.
- If something happens after October 14 that will prevent you from voting at the polls on Election Day, you may be eligible for an emergency mail ballot. Applications for an emergency mail ballot must be received no later than 4 p.m. on Monday, November 3. Contact your local board of canvassers for more information.

What if I miss the deadline for applying for a mail ballot?

* You can apply for a special mail ballot for President and Vice-President until October 28th.

What's the deadline for returning my mail ballot?

- To be counted, your mail ballot must be received by the state board of elections no later than 9 p.m. on Election Day.

VOTING ON ELECTION DAY

When is Election Day?

- Tuesday, November 4.

When are the polls open?

- Polling places will open between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. and will close at 9 p.m. You have the right to vote if you're in line at your polling place when the polls close. R.I. GEN. LAWS §§ 17-18-10, 17-18-11.

Can I get time off from work to vote?

- Maybe. The law doesn't require employers to give their employees paid or unpaid time off from work to vote, but your employer might have its own policy allowing you to do so. Ask your employer well before Election Day.

Where do I vote?

- On Election Day, you have to vote at the polling place to which you're assigned.
- Your assigned polling place may be listed on the registration acknowledgment notice that you should receive in the mail when you register. Keep in mind that the location listed on your acknowledgement notice is subject to change.

- Polling place locations will also be published in a local newspaper before the election.
- You can also call your local board of canvassers or look up your polling place online at <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/vic/>.

Can I take election materials with me into my polling place?

- Yes. You can take written or printed election materials with you as long as they're for your own use in casting your ballot. Examples include a sample ballot, a voter guide, or this card. But you're not allowed to display or distribute campaign materials to anyone within 50 feet of your polling place.

What if my polling place is not accessible?

- If you find this out before Election Day, call your local board of canvassers right away and ask for an alternative method of voting or reassignment to an accessible polling place. You have the right to an accessible polling place and an accessible voting machine. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-3.2.
- On Election Day, you can also bring one or more people to assist you. You have the right to have anyone you choose assist you as long as the person is not your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your labor union.

Can I get a ballot in my native language?

- If you vote in Providence or Central Falls, you have the right to assistance in Spanish. A designated poll worker is required to offer this assistance to you. If they don't, tell a poll worker that you want assistance in Spanish. You're also entitled to a translation of all ballots and other election materials.
- Even if assistance in your language isn't available where you vote, you have the right to bring an interpreter with you to the polls or to get assistance in your language from anyone you choose, including a poll worker, as long as the person is not your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your labor union.

What if I need help in the voting booth?

- If you need help because of a physical disability or because you can't read the ballot, tell a poll worker when you get to your polling place. You have the right to vote on an accessible voting machine. You also have the right to have anyone you choose assist you in the voting booth, including a poll worker, as long as the person is not your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your labor union. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-26.1.

- If you need instructions on how to use the voting equipment, ask a poll worker for help. A bi-partisan pair of poll workers is required to help you at any time you ask—even after you’ve entered the voting booth.

VOTER ID

Do I have to show ID?

- Probably not. Most voters won’t need to show ID at all.
- You may only need ID if you’re a first-time voter in Rhode Island who registered by mail or in a voter-registration drive and didn’t provide a verifiable RI driver’s license number, state ID number or last four digits of your social security number (either with the registration application or at any time before Election Day). If the number you provided was not verifiable, the board of canvassers is required to notify you of that fact.

What are the accepted forms of ID?

- Accepted forms of ID include a driver’s license or state ID card from any state, a military or student ID card, an employee ID card, a credit or debit card, a social security card, and a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, pay check, or any other government document that shows your name and address.
- For the complete list of accepted forms of ID, contact the State Board of Elections or your local board of canvassers.

What if I don’t have any ID or didn’t bring any ID with me to the polls?

- If the first-time-voter ID requirements apply to you, you can still cast a provisional ballot. A provisional ballot is used to record your vote when there’s an unresolved question about your eligibility. In order for your ballot to be counted in these circumstances, you must bring your ID to the polling place or your local board of canvassers by 9 PM on Election Day.
- Therefore, if you have time and have ID at home or work, it’s usually better to get your ID and return to the polls to cast a regular ballot.

PROBLEMS AT THE POLLS

What if I’m not on the voter list?

- First, ask a poll worker to check the list again and to confirm that you’re at the right polling place for your address.

- If you're at the right polling place but your name isn't on the voter list, ask for a provisional ballot. You have the right to cast a provisional ballot even if your name isn't on the voter list, as long as you're willing to swear that you believe you registered to vote. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-24.1.

What if I go to the wrong polling place?

- Go to the right polling place. You can ask a poll worker to help you find the polling place where you're registered. You can also call your local board of canvassers or look up your polling place online at <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/vic/>.
- If you can't figure out where you're registered, go the polling place that you think is most likely to be the right one for your address and ask for a provisional ballot. You have the right to cast a provisional ballot even if you're not sure that you're at the right polling place. However, if you cast your provisional ballot at the wrong polling place, only your votes for federal office will be counted.

What if someone challenges my right to vote?

- Ask for a provisional ballot. You have the right to cast a provisional ballot even if you've been challenged. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-27.

What if someone tries to intimidate or harass me?

- Tell a poll worker right away. If the poll worker is the problem, tell a poll watcher, call your local board of canvassers, call one of the election hotline numbers listed at the end of this card, or make a complaint online at <http://www.votingrights.org>. [R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-23-5.]

What if I make a mistake on my ballot or the voting machine malfunctions?

- Tell a poll worker before you cast your vote. If you make a mistake on your ballot, you have the right to a replacement ballot as long as you catch your mistake before you cast your ballot. If you haven't properly filled out the ballot, and the voting machine rejects it, you have the right to a replacement ballot. If your voting machine malfunctions, you can wait for the problem to be corrected or you can insert your ballot into the emergency bin. R.I. GEN. LAWS §§ 17-19-20, 17-19-24.

How do I make a complaint?

- First, ask for at the person in charge of your polling place. He or she can handle most routine complaints that arise on Election Day. Although they have no official standing, candidates, political parties, and nonprofit groups may also have poll watchers at your polling place who might be able to assist you if you wish. If

any of those people ask you who you voted for, or if they can't resolve your complaint, call your local board of canvassers, the State Board of Elections or the Secretary of State.

- You can also call one of the election hotline numbers listed at the end of this card or make a complaint online at <http://www.votingrights.org>.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING PROBLEMS

- Check your voter registration status at least 30 days before the election.
- Vote before Election Day, using mail ballot voting, if you're eligible to do so.
- If you plan to vote at the polls, locate your polling place at least a few days before the election.
- Avoid peak voting hours (7-9 AM and 5-7 PM).
- Bring some form of identification even if it's not required.
- Read all instructions carefully.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Take your time. You have up to 10 minutes in the voting booth to cast your vote. R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-24.
- Get a copy of the sample ballot so that you can familiarize yourself with it before entering the polling place. Sample ballots are available at www.sec.state.ri.us/vic

MORE INFORMATION

- Rhode Island Secretary of State: (401) 222-2340; and hotline 877-GO2-VOTE
- Rhode Island Board of Elections: (401) 222-2345
- U.S. Department of Justice: (800) 253-3931
- ACLU Voting Rights Project: (877) 523-2792; <http://www.votingrights.org>
- Rhode Island ACLU: (401) 831-7171