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Best Rule on Absentee Voting: Do It Yourself

With campaigns, political organizations and other groups sending voters unsolicited absentee applications, Chicago Election Board Chairman Langdon D. Neal reminded voters on Thursday that the best rule to follow is “do it yourself.”

“This is the first year that Illinois voters are joining tens of millions of voters in other states who may cast absentee ballots from their homes without stating a reason or excuse. No longer do voters have to list work commitments, travel plans or sickness,” Neal said. “But that also means that many organizations are promoting the option of absentee voting with pre-printed absentee applications. Every voter needs to know the absentee voting rule of thumb is ‘do it yourself.’ ”

Neal said voters who receive such applications should know the following:

- It’s up to you whether or not to vote absentee ballot. You may fill out any application you receive or simply discard it. If there’s bad information pre-printed on the form, don’t use that form.
- You may apply for an absentee ballot directly to the Chicago Election Board at 69 W. Washington St., Suite 600, Chicago 60602. Forms are available at our offices, on the Internet at chicagoelections.com or by calling 312.269.7900
- If you vote absentee, be sure to vote privately and independently.
- Always return your absentee ballot directly to the Election Board – and never submit an absentee ballot through an outside organization.
- You must get the application into our office by Oct. 28.
- You must mail the ballot by Nov. 1. If you do not mail it by then, you must vote at your polling place on Election Day, Nov. 2.
“We have received calls from voters who say that inaccurate information came on preprinted forms,” Neal said. “We want them to know that we did not generate these mailings. If in doubt, tear it up and toss it out.”

“If you want to vote by mail, visit our web site to get your own form, or contact a local ward office or call us at 312.269.7900 to mail you a blank form.”

“Voters may download an absentee ballot application at our web site at www.chicagoelections.com, and if voters have any questions about the absentee process, they may visit our web site or call us at 312-269-7900,” Neal said. “As always, we encourage the voter to call us immediately if anyone attempts to interfere with their private and independent casting of a ballot.”

To assist voters, the Election Board this week started offering the status of the absentee ballot chicagoelections.com to let voters check whether their application has been received, whether the request has been processed, and then if the voter's returned ballot has been received by the Board.

Neal noted that if a pre-printed form has outdated information, it is important that voters get their own form and provide only the address of their current voter registration.

“We also have been in steady contact with the Postal Service to assure that the applications they see that might be mismarked as ‘County Clerk’ or the wrong street address are being routed to our office,” Neal said. “This only creates a possible problem with the private groups’ applications. Once we get the application, the ballots that we process provide our mailing materials with the correct return address for the voter to return the ballot.”

Additionally, some voters have called to complain to the office, asking why, for example, a form was sent to a wife but not a husband in the same household. “Different mailings have targeted specific genders and age groups of voters. We want to assure you that these private organizations – not the Election Board – are preparing these mailings and deciding which voters to target.”

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