

Absentee, Physically Disabled and Specially Qualified Voting

Absentee Ballots

Voters who are unable to vote on Election Day due to physical disability, religious beliefs or travel may vote by absentee ballot. State law limits the availability of absentee ballots to the three listed circumstances only. Absentee ballots are not available for mere inconvenience, or because of ordinary commuting-related difficulties. If you will be absent from Sunderland for an extended period of time, you may submit a single application for all elections occurring within the calendar year the application is accepted.

Applications for absentee ballots may be obtained from the Town Clerk or are available on the Commonwealth's web site at:

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleifv/howabs.htm>

Applications may be submitted by the voter, or a family member on the voter's behalf. All applications must be signed under the pains and penalties of perjury by the voter, or a family member, before a ballot will be made available, attesting that:

"Under the penalties of perjury, I swear (or affirm) that I am eligible to vote in Massachusetts at the address below, that I will request a ballot only from the city

or town below, that I cannot vote in person at the polls on election day because of absence from the city or town, physical disability, or religious belief, and that the information below is true. I have carefully read the instructions on the back of

(or with) the ballot, have marked the ballot while alone or with assisting person

(if required), and have sealed it in the envelope."

Applications for absentee ballots must be received by the Town Clerk before 12:00 noon the day before an election. (A voter who is admitted to a health care facility after noon of the fifth day before an election may apply for a ballot up until the close of the polls and may request to have the ballot delivered.) Absentee ballots generally are available three weeks before an election.

For a primary election, an "unenrolled" (independent) voter may choose which ballot to vote. Ballot of choice must be indicated on absentee ballot application.

Return of Absentee Ballots

Absentee ballots must be received before the polls close to be counted. However, absentee ballots, completed outside the U.S., for the state general election will be counted if received by 5:00 p.m. on the tenth day following the election. This exception does not apply to Sunderland Town elections or state primaries.

Permanently Physically Disabled Voters

A voter who is permanently disabled need not submit a request for an absentee ballot every election. If such a voter submits a written statement from a registered physician indicating that he is disabled permanently, the Town Clerk will mail to the registered voter an application for an absentee ballot twenty-eight days before every election. The application will be as complete as the Town Clerk can make it, and the voter in most cases need only sign the application and return it. Upon the Town Clerk's receipt of the signed application, the voter will be sent an absentee ballot.

If the voter submits an application for an absentee ballot in person, he/she may obtain the ballot (call first to see if it is available) and vote "over-the-counter". If the ballot is not available, it will be sent to the voter when available. When the application is submitted in person by a family member, the ballot may only be sent by mail to the voter. Ballots may not be "hand carried" out of the Town Clerk's office. Ballots may be returned by mail or in person by the voter or family member. All ballot envelopes must be signed by the voter or, if the voter is unable to sign, by an assisting person.

Specially Qualified Voters

In addition to registered voters, certain "specially qualified voters" may vote by absentee ballot. A "specially qualified voter" is a person who is a Massachusetts citizen, living outside of the United States, who is at least eighteen years old and whose last residence in the United States was Massachusetts. You also may be a "specially qualified voter" if you are otherwise eligible to be a registered voter and your present domicile (a place where you live and plan to remain) is Massachusetts and you are: out of town because you are in the active service of the armed forces or merchant marine of the United States, or a spouse or dependent of such person; absent from the Commonwealth; or confined in a correctional facility or jail, except if by reason of felony conviction.