

## 2020 Final Preparations for Uniformed and Overseas Citizens

As we approach the statutory transmission deadline of September 19<sup>th</sup>, the entire team at the Federal Voting Assistance Program would like to thank you for all you do to assist every member of the Active Duty military, their families and U.S. citizens overseas to successfully cast an absentee ballot. We recognize the nation's election officials have responded to a challenging year and are responding to a lot of information, but we wanted to provide one comprehensive update to assist you in your efforts to support provisions outlined in the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). The information below is a summary of key items to know based on ongoing status meetings with the United States Postal Service and the Military Postal Service Agency.

### **September 19<sup>th</sup> Mailing Date**

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 international postal disruptions, we want to share our thoughts on how best to prepare for September 19<sup>th</sup> and what to anticipate:

1. No postal disruptions are occurring at this time with APO/FPO military mail.
2. For countries listed as experiencing International Mail Service Suspensions (see link below), election officials should anticipate postal ballots processed as Return to Sender. We encourage election officials to review ballot rosters for ballots going to these countries and attempt to resend the ballots once the country is removed from the list, and contact the voter to see if electronic transmission of the blank ballot may be an option.  
USPS Reference link:  
<https://about.usps.com/newsroom/service-alerts/international/welcome.htm>
3. Voters residing overseas should be encouraged to request balloting materials electronically as international postal operations have terminated service or may continue to experience delays depending on health conditions.
4. Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) staff will be available from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM Eastern on September 19<sup>th</sup> to answer any questions or assist with issues as they arise at 1-800-438-VOTE (8683).
5. Communicate with your local post office where you plan to drop off your UOCAVA ballots to be sure they will be open for receiving mail that Saturday; if not open, plan to drop them off by the day before.
6. Refer to [FVAP.gov/COVID-19](https://fvap.gov/COVID-19) for the latest news and information.

## **Ballot Return and Use of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot**

1. Ballots from overseas military personnel and their eligible family members (APO/FPO/DPO) will be returned as expedited mail. This mail will have a blue and white label (Label 11-DoD) affixed to the top of the envelope. Military Postal Clerks are instructed not to fold this label over signature lines on the back of the return envelope.
2. Ballots delivered to the United States Postal Service through US embassy and consulate diplomatic pouch service are processed at Dulles, VA – they may have two postmarks, a consular seal, or just one postmark from Dulles, VA.
3. Finally, some voters may pay to have their ballots delivered by commercial courier services (e.g., FedEx, DHL, UPS, Airborne, etc.) which may not have a postmark or time/date stamp. We are advising voters to ensure these materials are scheduled for delivery no later than the time of poll closing on election day (or by any other deadline under applicable state law) so no confusion exists on the applicability of postmarks.

### General Reminders:

Below are reminders of the federal rules regarding handling of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB). Remember, military and their families are covered anywhere outside of their residence jurisdiction – one county away - to across the country - to anywhere around the world.

### **FPCA-Registration and Ballot Request**

1. The FPCA serves as a simultaneous request for voter registration and absentee ballot request for UOCAVA voters.
2. As most states have a different deadline for voter registration and absentee ballot requests, be sure to pay close attention to the voter's status in the voter registration database, and whether the FPCA should be recognized as a registration request, absentee ballot request, and/or an update to the voter's information.
3. Election officials should review state guidance on the acceptance of the FPCA to determine the ballot type to send to UOCAVA voters (e.g. full ballot or federal ballot only) as authorized.
4. Some overseas citizens may use a mail forwarding service to ensure timely delivery of mail from the states as they are not able to depend on the local country's mail service. Voters should provide their actual physical residence overseas and their mail forwarding address (usually stateside) when requesting an absentee ballot.

Finally, UOCAVA requires election offices to notify voters if their FPCA for voter registration request or absentee ballot request was rejected and the reason for the rejection.

## **FWAB- Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot**

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot is for UOCAVA voters who have requested an absentee ballot for the election for federal office, and, based on their location or other circumstances, feel they do not have enough time to return their voted ballot in time to meet the state deadline.

1. This would definitely apply to any voter who submitted an FPCA, or applicable state ballot request form, since January 1, 2020, or earlier depending on the state rules on FPCA eligibility.
2. Voters may submit the FWAB for an election for federal office(s) as soon as they feel they will not be able to timely submit the official state ballot – which can mean they may submit the FWAB before state ballots are sent out.
3. Voters may write in the party name next to the office, and the candidate for that party should be counted as the vote cast. The external FWAB envelope has a space for the voter to write in the election date the enclosed ballot is intended to be used, so states with later scheduled primaries, run-off or special elections should be aware in case an intended general election FWAB arrives before the primary, run-off or special election date.

## **Fax Transmission Service and Electronic Receipt of Voting Materials**

FVAP continues to offer its fax conversion service for voters who lack access to a fax machine and if state law permits only postal or fax return of voted ballots. Election officials should prepare for the following:

1. FVAP may have large volumes of voted ballots to process and dispatch as faxes to election officials. If fax transmissions are delayed beyond official ballot receipt deadlines, FVAP personnel will include a notice of the ballots' timely receipt and attempts to complete the fax transmission on behalf of the voter.
2. If your state allows voters to return voting materials via fax, please carefully review the fax numbers listed on [FVAP.gov/search-offices](https://www.fvap.gov/search-offices) and contact us if any changes are needed. If possible, please provide us with any alternate fax numbers to use leading up to Election Day.
3. States allowing for the fax or electronic receipt of voting materials should be very specific in the instructions provided to voters for the return of voted ballots. This should include the use of a secrecy waiver. The FVAP cover sheet [<https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/coversheet.pdf>] is available for your use.

Check with your state election office if you have questions regarding state specific rules and deadlines for UOCAVA election materials.

As we move forward together, just know that the team at the Federal Voting Assistance Program are proud partners with our Nation's election officials. Please let us know if we can assist you and please continue to keep us informed of changes to election office addresses and contact information. FVAP staff may be reached from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern, Mondays-Fridays, by calling 800-438-VOTE (8683) or [vote@fvap.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.gov).