

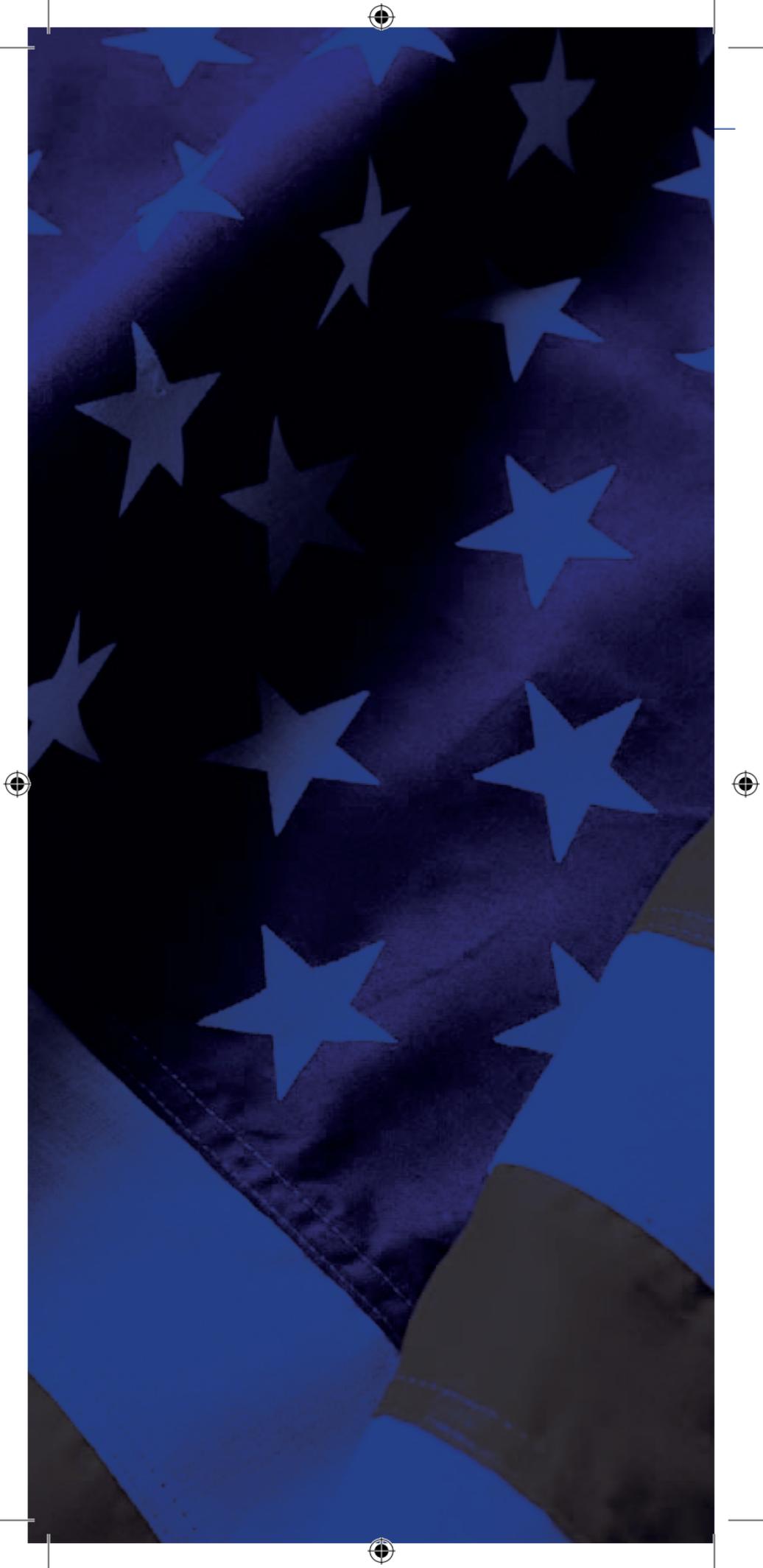
U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

A VOTER'S GUIDE

to Federal Elections



SEPTEMBER 2011



A VOTER'S GUIDE to Federal Elections

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) offers this guide to help voters successfully navigate the Federal election process from registering to vote through casting a ballot on Election Day. In addition to providing the basics of casting a ballot, this guide includes information on voter eligibility, early voting, alternative registration and voting processes for uniformed and overseas citizens, and polling place accommodations that make voting more accessible to all voters.

AM I ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

To be eligible to vote, you must be a U.S. citizen. In most States, you must be 18 years of age to vote. Some States, however, allow 17-year-olds to vote in a primary preceding a November election during which they will be 18 years old. Other States allow 17-year-olds to register to vote if they will turn 18 by the general election. States also have their own residency requirements to vote. For additional information about State-specific requirements and voter eligibility, contact your State or local election offices. The National Mail Voter Registration Form also contains each State's requirements. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*



HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You may choose one of several ways to apply for voter registration.

Registering to vote by mail

You may apply to register to vote by completing and submitting by mail the National Mail Voter Registration Form.¹ The “State Instructions” section of the National Mail Voter Registration Form provides information about where to mail the form in your State. You may also use the form to report a name or address change to a voter registration office or to register with a political party, if required by your State. The National Mail Voter Registration Form can be downloaded from the EAC’s Web site at www.eac.gov/NVRA. In addition, you may apply to register to vote by using your State’s voter registration form. Both the National Mail Voter Registration Form and State voter registration forms may be available at public libraries, public schools, and city or county clerk’s offices.

Registering to vote in person

You may be able to apply to register to vote in person at the following public facilities:

- State or local voter registration and/or election offices
- The department of motor vehicles
- Public assistance agencies
- Armed services recruitment centers
- State-funded programs that serve people with disabilities
- Any public facility that a State has designated as a voter registration agency

¹ North Dakota, Wyoming, and U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) do not accept this form. New Hampshire accepts it only as a request for a State absentee voter mail-in registration form.

Registering to vote online

Certain States now allow citizens to apply to register to vote online. To learn if your State offers online voter registration, please contact your State or local election office. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*

WHEN SHOULD I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You must register to vote by your State's registration deadline to ensure voting eligibility. Each State has its own registration deadline. You can find this information by accessing the "State Instructions" section of the National Mail Voter Registration Form at www.eac.gov/NVRA or by contacting your State or local election office. Many States have online tools that enable voters to check their registration status if they are unsure if they are registered.

IMPORTANT: Contact your State or local election office at least seven (7) weeks before an election to learn if you are registered to vote and what to do if you are not. It is important to make the inquiry before the registration deadline to allow sufficient time to register to vote.

ARE THERE SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS THE FIRST TIME I VOTE?

If you registered to vote through the mail, Federal law may require you to show proof of identification the first time you vote. This proof of identification includes the following (or if registering to vote by mail, a COPY of the following):

- A current and valid photo identification; OR
- A current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or government document that shows your name and address.

You will not be required by Federal law to show proof of identification at the polling place or when voting by mail, however, if (1) you provided COPIES of the proof of identification listed above with your voter registration form; (2) your State or local election official matched the driver's license number or Social Security information submitted on your voter registration application with an existing Federal or State identification record bearing the same number, name and date of birth as provided in such registration; or (3) you are entitled by Federal law to vote by absentee ballot.

Did You Know...?

Some States require identification at the polling place even if a voter has met the Federal proof-of-identification requirement necessary for voter registration. These identification requirements affect all voters in the State, and you may be eligible to cast a provisional ballot if you do not have sufficient identification at the polling place. Contact your State or local election office for additional information on your State's voter identification requirements. (See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)

WHAT IS EARLY VOTING?

Some States allow voters to cast a ballot before Election Day. Broadly defined, early voting is voting conducted before Election Day during which a voter completes a ballot in person at a jurisdiction's election office, other designated polling place, or ballot drop site.

Early voting dates and times vary among States. For information about whether and when your State offers early voting, contact your State or local election office. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*

WHAT IS ABSENTEE VOTING?

Voters who cannot go to their polling place on Election Day may qualify to cast an absentee ballot. Each State establishes its own rules and procedures for absentee voting. For example, some States allow voters to cast an absentee ballot only if they are unable to vote at the polling place for a reason outlined in State law, such as illness or physical absence from the jurisdiction for a certain number of hours on Election Day. Other States offer “no-excuse” absentee voting, which allows any eligible citizen to cast an absentee ballot.

States also have different deadlines for requesting and submitting absentee ballots. If you need to vote absentee, contact your State or local election office as soon as possible to confirm your eligibility to cast an absentee ballot and to ensure that you do not miss the deadline for requesting and submitting an absentee ballot. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*

In addition, voters meeting certain qualifications are entitled by Federal law to vote by absentee ballot in Federal elections. These Federal laws include the Voting Rights Act, Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, and Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act.

IMPORTANT: After you have requested and received your absentee ballot, read the instructions carefully to avoid any errors that may result in your ballot not being counted. Also, be sure to sign your name where it is required. If you return your absentee ballot by mail, be certain to affix a sufficient amount of postage to the return envelope to prevent any delays in the delivery of your ballot.



WHERE DO I VOTE— WHERE IS MY POLLING PLACE?

Voters are assigned to a polling place based on the home address listed on the voter registration record. At least two States conduct elections entirely by mail and, therefore, do not have polling places. In these States, voters may also submit their ballots at ballot drop sites located throughout the jurisdictions. To find out the location of your polling place or available ballot drop sites, contact your State or local election office or check your State or local election office's Web site, which may have a polling place locator tool. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*

IMPORTANT: Update your voter registration information each time you move.

WHAT IS PROVISIONAL VOTING?

Voters whose eligibility to vote is in question must be offered a provisional ballot at the polling place during Federal elections. In those cases, voters have a right to cast a provisional ballot, provided that they declare they are eligible and registered to vote in that jurisdiction. The provisional ballot is counted if the appropriate State or local election official determines that the voter was eligible and registered to vote under State law.

The reasons a voter must be offered a provisional ballot include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The voter's name does not appear on the official list of voters at his or her polling place
2. The voter's eligibility is challenged in accordance with state law
3. A court order requiring provisional ballots
4. A court order extending polling place hours
5. State law mandates provisional ballots

If you did not provide the identification required to register to vote under Federal law and do not provide it at the polling place on Election Day, you may be eligible to cast a provisional ballot.

Did You Know...?

Federal law requires States to provide a "free access system" accessible by toll-free number and/or the Internet that enables voters to check the status of their provisional ballots. Contact your State or local election office for more information about your State's system. (See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR UNIFORMED AND OVERSEAS CITIZENS?

To register to vote, members of the military and overseas citizens may use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP's) Web portal at www.fvap.gov. The FVAP Web portal offers a step-by-step tool to guide military service members and overseas citizens through the voter registration process. All States and territories accept the FPCA as a simultaneous application for registration and a request for an absentee ballot. Depending on your State of residence, you can return the completed FPCA by e-mail, fax, or mail. If you mail the FPCA, send it in an envelope with proper postage or in an FVAP prepaid return envelope. Go to www.fvap.gov to see how to return your form.

If you are already registered to vote, you may still submit an FPCA to request a ballot, ideally early in the Federal election year. Printed copies of the FPCA are available at U.S. embassies, military bases and consular offices. Voting Assistance Officers at those sites can provide any information or assistance you may need to complete the form. If you need help with the absentee voting process, visit the FVAP Web site at www.fvap.gov, contact the FVAP at (703) 588-1584 (toll free at [800] 438-VOTE; also available toll free from 70 countries at www.fvap.gov/contact/tollfreephone.html), or e-mail the program at vote@fvap.gov.

Military service members and overseas citizens may also request the electronic transmission of blank voting materials.

Jurisdictions that mail voting materials are required to send them to the requesting voter 45 days before an election to ensure sufficient time to receive and return voted ballots.

IS VOTING ACCESSIBLE FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES?

Most polling places are designed with accommodations to make the voting process more accessible to all voters, including those voters with disabilities. Accessibility accommodations include clearly marked parking spaces, entrances with ramps, and well-marked routes and signage indicating the way to voting locations.

Polling places must have voting equipment that is accessible for individuals with disabilities, including nonvisual accessibility for the blind and visually impaired, in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters.

If you have questions about the accessibility of your polling place, or if you need information about voting equipment for individuals with disabilities, contact your State or local election office. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*



IS LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED?

The Voting Rights Act requires some jurisdictions to provide voting materials in languages other than English. Other jurisdictions voluntarily offer such assistance. Language assistance may include equipping polling places with voting materials (such as ballots and voting instructions) in other languages, staffing polling places with bilingual poll workers, and providing voting information online in languages other than English. Contact your State or local election office to learn more about language assistance in your area. (*See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.*)

Did You Know...?

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission provides information for voters on its Web site in English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The National Mail Voter Registration Form is available in the above seven languages to assist voters and election officials. EAC has developed an interactive online glossary of election terminology, available at www.eac.gov, and has issued comprehensive hardcopy glossaries of election terminology in six languages. A Voter's Guide to Federal Elections is available in English, Cherokee, Chinese, Dakota, Japanese, Korean, Navajo, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Yup'ik.

MAY I REQUEST ASSISTANCE TO VOTE?

Under Federal law, voters who require assistance to vote for reason of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write may bring an individual, such as a friend or relative, to assist them in voting.² A poll worker

² Federal law prohibits voters from receiving voting assistance from the voter's employer or agent of the employer or officer or agent of the voter's union.

may also provide voting assistance. State election laws may include additional provisions governing such assistance, so be sure to contact your State or local election office for additional information.

First-time voters, voters with disabilities, and voters at polling places with new voting equipment may require assistance with the equipment. If you need help using the voting equipment, ask a poll worker for assistance. Poll workers are there to provide voters with instructions and demonstrations about using the voting equipment.

Did You Know...?

Some States offer “curbside voting” for voters who are not able to easily leave their cars. During curbside voting, a poll worker brings all voting materials, including a ballot, to the voter’s car. Check with your State or local election office to see if curbside voting is available in your jurisdiction and for information about who qualifies to use the program.

HOW DO I REPORT A PROBLEM OR FILE A COMPLAINT?

If you experience a problem at a polling place or with voting procedures in your jurisdiction, you may report the problem or file a complaint. Contact your State or local election office for information on complaint procedures. You may also register a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice at (888) 736-5551 or voting.section@usdoj.gov. (See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)

HOW CAN I BECOME A POLL WORKER?

Poll workers are essential to ensuring smooth, fair, and accurate elections. They manage the polling place by setting up voting equipment, verifying voter registrations, and providing voters with appropriate ballots or instructing them on the use of voting systems. At the end of the day, poll workers close the polling place, prepare election materials for delivery to the central election office, and submit their polling place results.

Poll workers typically must be registered to vote in the county or State they wish to serve. Some States, however, allow college and high school students to work at the polls near their school, even if they are not registered to vote in that jurisdiction.

To find out more about how to become a poll worker, contact your State or local election office. *(See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)*

About the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC)

This publication was prepared by the EAC, an independent Federal commission established by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002. The EAC is charged with developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information about election administration. The EAC also accredits testing laboratories and certifies voting systems, audits the use of HAVA funds, and maintains the National Mail Voter Registration Form developed in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

VOTER'S CHECKLIST—THINGS TO DO BEFORE ELECTION DAY

- Confirm you are registered to vote several weeks before the date of the election. Update your registration if information such as address, name, or political affiliation has changed.
- Know how and when to apply for an absentee ballot if you are unable to vote at your polling place on Election Day.
- Know your options for early voting.
- Know the voter identification requirements in your State before you attempt to vote.
- Know which polling place you are assigned to and how to get there.
- Familiarize yourself with the voting device used in your jurisdiction. Learn how the device is accessible to voters with disabilities.
- Learn what assistance is available in languages other than English.
- Know what time the polls open and close.
- Become acquainted with the candidates and issues on the ballot.
- Consider becoming a poll worker in your community. Call your local election office to learn about poll worker requirements.

VOTER'S RESOURCES

U.S. Election Assistance Commission: A comprehensive resource of information on the Federal elections process. Citizens can register to vote by downloading the National Mail Voter Registration Form from the EAC's Web site.

Tel.: (866) 747-1471 / Web site: www.eac.gov

Federal Voting Assistance Program: Voting resources for uniformed service members and overseas citizens, including the Federal Post Card Application, a voter registration form for citizens living abroad.

Tel.: (800) 438-8683 / Web site: www.fvap.gov

U.S. Department of Justice: Information about Federal voting rights laws. To report problems related to ballot access, including voter discrimination, call the Voting Section at (800) 253-3931. For voter fraud or intimidation, call the nearest office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation or your local U.S. Attorney's Office. You may also file complaints with your State or local election official.

Tel.: (202) 514-2000 / Web site: www.usdoj.gov

Federal Election Commission: A clearinghouse of information on Federal campaign finance.

Tel.: (800) 424-9530 / Web site: www.fec.gov

STATE ELECTION OFFICE

Contact Information

**as of September 1, 2011*

ALABAMA

Tel.: (800) 274-8683

Web site: www.sos.state.al.us/elections

ALASKA

Tel.: (907) 465-4611

Web site: www.elections.alaska.gov

AMERICAN SAMOA

Tel.: (684) 699-3570

Web site: www.americansamoelectionoffice.org

ARIZONA

Tel.: (602) 542-8683

Web site: www.azsos.gov/election

ARKANSAS

Tel.: (800) 482-1127

Web site: www.sosweb.state.ar.us/elections

CALIFORNIA

Tel.: (800) 345-VOTE

Web site: www.sos.ca.gov/elections

COLORADO

Tel.: (303) 894-2200

Web site: www.elections.colorado.gov

CONNECTICUT

Tel.: (860) 509-6100

Web site: www.ct.gov/sots

DELAWARE

Tel.: (302) 739-4277

Web site: www.elections.delaware.gov

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Tel.: (202) 727-2525

Web site: www.dcboee.org

FLORIDA

Tel.: (866) 308-6739

Web site: <http://election.dos.state.fl.us>

GEORGIA

Tel.: (404) 656-2871

Web site: www.sos.ga.gov/elections

GUAM

Tel.: (671) 477-9791

Web site: <http://gec.guam.gov>

HAWAII

Tel.: (808) 453-8683

Web site: <http://hawaii.gov/elections>

IDAHO

Tel.: (208) 334-2852

Web site: www.idahovotes.gov

ILLINOIS

Tel.: (217) 782-4141 (Springfield)

Tel.: (312) 269-7960 (Chicago)

Web site: www.elections.state.il.us

INDIANA

Tel.: (317) 232-3939

Web site: www.in.gov/sos/elections

IOWA

Tel.: (515) 281-0145

Web site: www.sos.state.ia.us/elections

KANSAS

Tel.: (800) 262-8683

Web site: www.kssos.org/elections/elections.html

KENTUCKY

Tel.: (502) 564-3490

Web site: www.elect.ky.gov

LOUISIANA

Tel.: (800) 883-2805

Web site: www.geauxvote.com

MAINE

Tel.: (207) 624-7736

Web site: www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec

MARYLAND

Tel.: (800) 222-8683

Web site: www.elections.state.md.us

MASSACHUSETTS

Tel.: (800) 462-8683

Web site: www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleidx.htm

MICHIGAN

Tel.: (517) 373-2540

Web site: www.michigan.gov/vote**MINNESOTA**

Tel.: (877) 600-8683

Web site: www.sos.state.mn.us**MISSISSIPPI**

Tel.: (800) 829-6786

Web site: www.sos.ms.gov/elections.aspx**MISSOURI**

Tel.: (800) 669-8683

Web site: www.sos.mo.gov/elections**MONTANA**

Tel.: (888) 884-8683

Web site: <http://sos.mt.gov/elections>**NEBRASKA**

Tel.: (402) 471-2555

Web site: www.sos.ne.gov**NEVADA**

Tel.: (775) 684-5705

Web site: <http://sos.state.nv.us/elections>**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Tel.: (603) 271-3242

Web site: www.sos.nh.gov/electionsnew.html**NEW JERSEY**

Tel.: (609) 292-3760

Web site: www.njelections.org**NEW MEXICO**

Tel.: (800) 477-3632

Web site: www.sos.state.nm.us/sos-elections.html**NEW YORK**

Tel.: (800) 367-8683

Web site: www.elections.state.ny.us**NORTH CAROLINA**

Tel.: (866) 522-4723

Web site: www.sboe.state.nc.us**NORTH DAKOTA**

Tel.: (800) 352-0867

Web site: www.nd.gov/sos/electvote

OHIO

Tel.: (877) 767-6446

Web site: www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/elections.aspx

OKLAHOMA

Tel.: (405) 521-2391

Web site: www.ok.gov/~elections

OREGON

Tel.: (503) 986-1518

Web site: www.sos.state.or.us/elections

PENNSYLVANIA

Tel.: (717) 787-5280

Web site: www.votespa.com

PUERTO RICO

Tel.: (787) 758-3333

Web site: www.ceepur.org

RHODE ISLAND

Tel.: (401) 222-2345

Web site: www.elections.state.ri.us

SOUTH CAROLINA

Tel.: (803) 734-9060

Web site: www.scvotes.org

SOUTH DAKOTA

Tel.: (605) 773-3537

Web site: www.sdsos.gov

TENNESSEE

Tel.: (877) 850-4959

Web site: www.tennessee.gov/sos/election

TEXAS

Tel.: (800) 252-8683

Web site: www.sos.state.tx.us/elections

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Tel.: (877) 773-1021 (St. Croix)

Tel.: (877) 774-3107 (St. Thomas | St. John)

Web site: www.vivote.gov

UTAH

Tel.: (800) 995-8683

Web site: www.elections.utah.gov/voterinformation.html

VERMONT

Tel.: (802) 828-2464

Web site: <http://vermont-elections.org>

VIRGINIA

Tel.: (800) 552-9745

Web site: www.sbe.virginia.gov

WASHINGTON

Tel.: (800) 448-4881

Web site: www.secstate.wa.gov/elections

WEST VIRGINIA

Tel.: (304) 558-6000

Web site: www.sos.wv.gov/elections

WISCONSIN

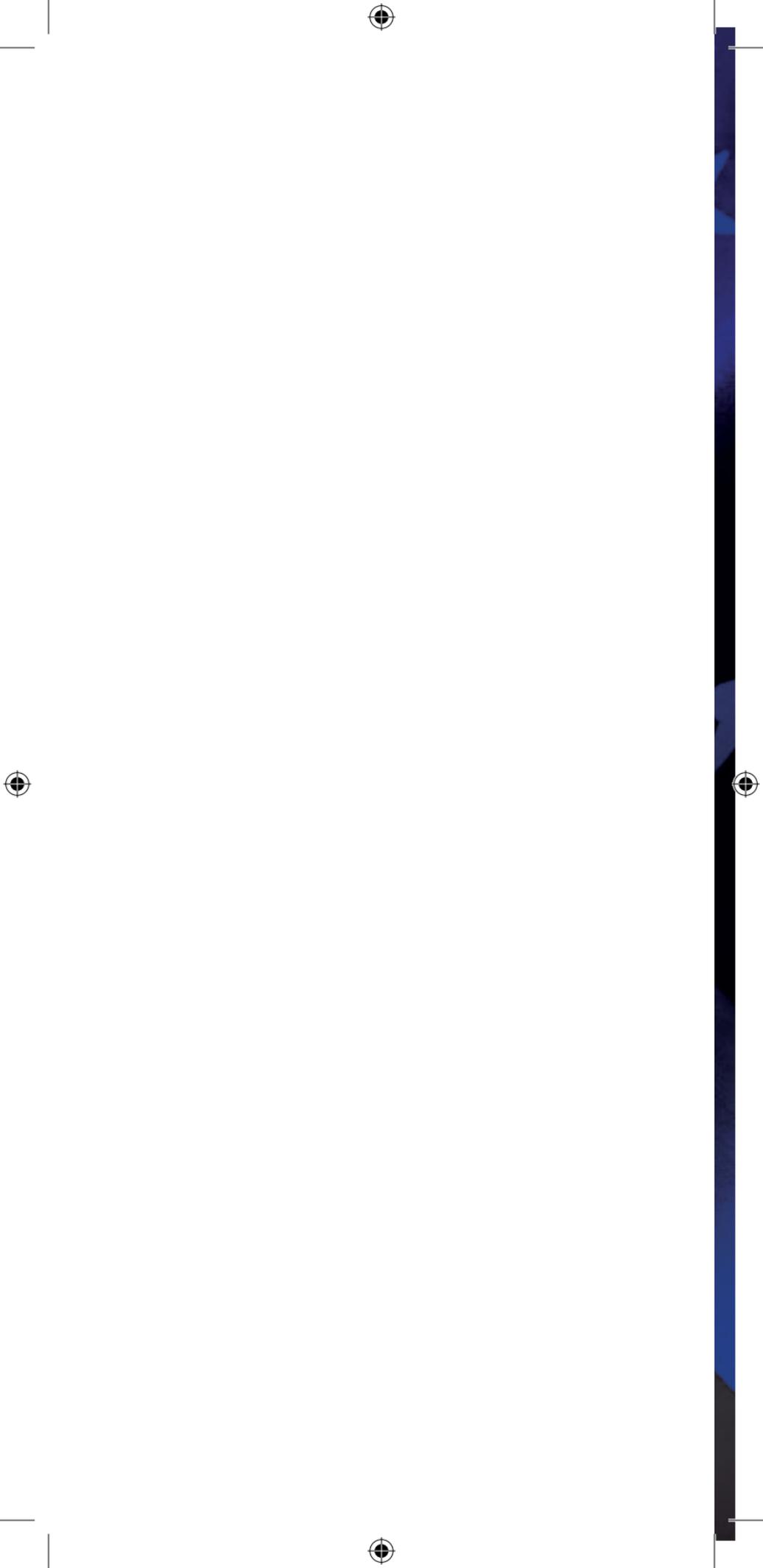
Tel.: (866) 868-3947

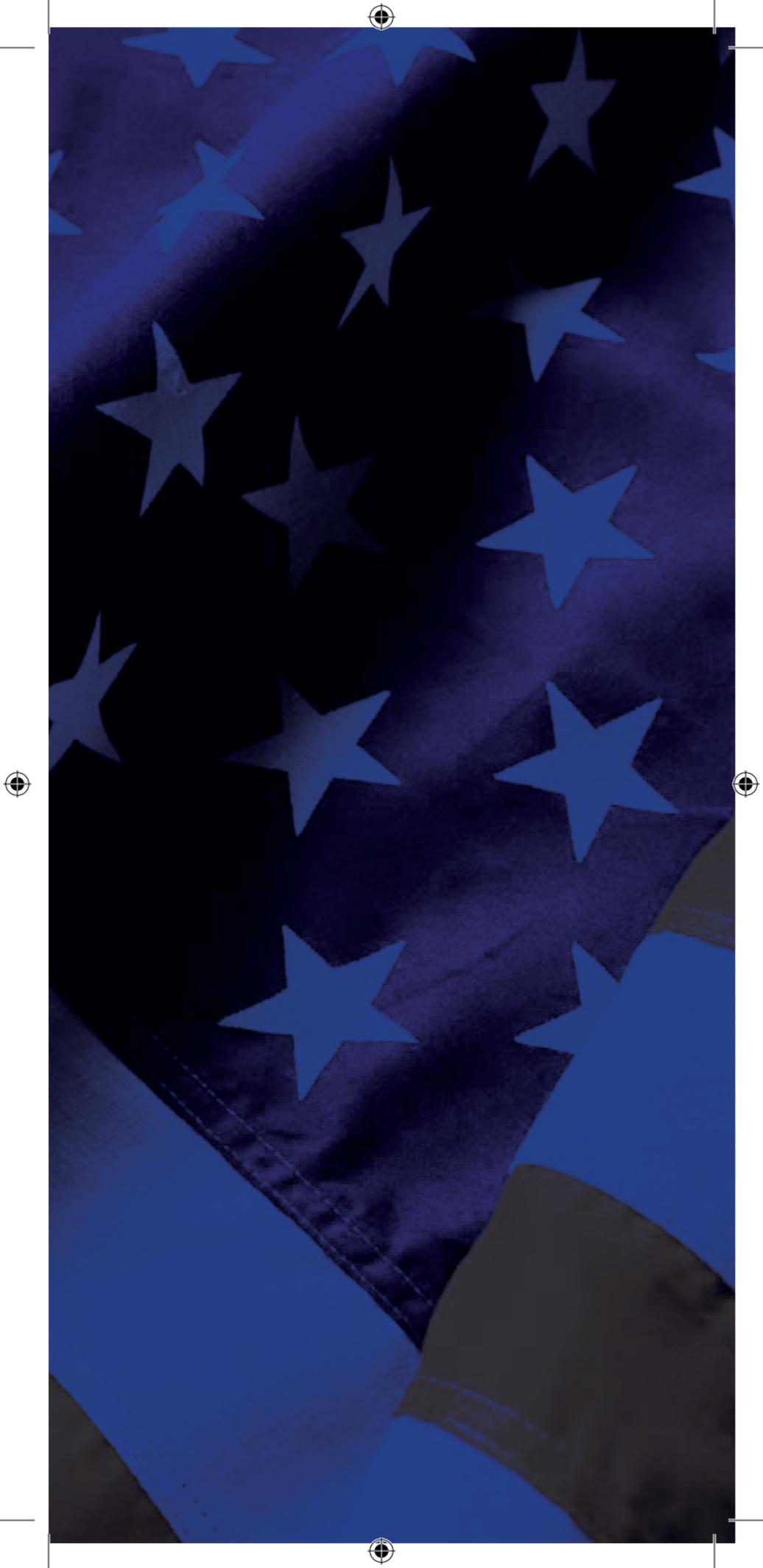
Web site: <http://gab.wi.gov>

WYOMING

Tel.: (307) 777-7186

Web site: <http://soswy.state.wy.us/elections/elections.aspx>







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