



Emergency Medical Ballots: Challenges and Strategies for Improvement

Emergency Medical Ballots

- ▶ Used for an in-person voter unable to go to a polling place because of a medical emergency the week of Election Day (e.g., in a hospital, homebound, etc.).

Background

- ▶ A clear majority of the calls we received on our Voting Hotline over the last several election cycles were from voters who were hospitalized or otherwise unable to get to a polling location due to a medical emergency who wished to be able to cast their ballot.

Every Elections Office Has Its Own Process.

- ▶ Counties widely differ on how a voter may obtain and cast an emergency medical ballot.
- ▶ Some require very specific forms, specific designation of an agent for the voter and multiple trips back and forth from the voter to the Elections Office.
- ▶ There is no uniformity.

The Elections Code Only Requires Certain Specific Information.

- ▶ The Elections Code (sec. 3021) has only a minimum of specific requirements for an Emergency Medical Ballot Application form, such as Name, Location, Date, Designated Agent and Signature of Voter.
- ▶ Voters may request an emergency medical ballot when the deadline for requesting a regular VBM ballot has passed. (7 days prior to the Election).
- ▶ No specific form is required.

Example #1

- ▶ Last June, a voter was unexpectedly hospitalized in a rural county and wanted to vote. His granddaughter contacted DRC's hotline to request assistance getting his ballot. We gave him information on how to vote in the hospital.
- ▶ Unfortunately, the hospital did not have access to the emergency medical ballot request form and had not been trained on the process to assist voters in this situation.
- ▶ The granddaughter could not make two trips to the County Elections Office and the County was unable to deliver a ballot to the voter due to their limited staffing. As a result, the voter was unable to cast his ballot in the Elections.

Example #2

- ▶ A hospitalized voter with a spinal infection called DRC's Voting Hotline on Election Day to find out if she could vote in the hospital.
- ▶ I emailed her a sample emergency medical ballot application I created based on the statute and explained the process.
- ▶ The voter's husband took the signed application form to County Elections Office and delivered his wife's ballot to her.
- ▶ After the voter completed her ballot, her husband delivered it to the polling place nearest to the hospital by 8PM on Election Night.

Suggestions for Improvements

- ▶ Simplifying the process and using a recommended emergency medical ballot application form, a draft of which the State VAAC is considering would make it more convenient for voters to obtain an emergency medical ballot where necessary.
- ▶ Voter education through Voter Information Guides, online on the County Elections offices and perhaps a video on the Secretary of State's website.
- ▶ Ensure application form is available online.
- ▶ Communication with hospitals and train hospital staff to use application form.
- ▶ Additional Voter outreach can be developed to further publicize the Emergency Medical Ballot availability.