



*California's Protection & Advocacy System  
Toll-Free (800) 776-5746*

# How Regional Centers Can Help You Register to Vote

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This publication gives information to people who receive services from the regional centers about their right to register to vote. This publication gives information in a question and answer format and explains who can register to vote and how regional centers can help.

1. I receive services from the regional center. Do I have the right to vote?

Yes. You can vote:

- Even if you receive services from the regional center and have a developmental or intellectual disability;
- Even if you live in a development center, group home, or other places where you receive care;
- Even if you have a conservator, unless a court has said that you cannot vote.

2. I want to vote, what do I have to do?

In order to vote, you have to first register. You do this by filling out a Voter Registration Card. If you need help to get and fill out a Voter Registration Card, the regional center can help you. Please see Questions 4-7.

3. Who is eligible to register to vote in California?

Anyone who wants to register to vote must meet the following:

- Be a United States citizen;
- Be a resident of California;
- Be at least 18 years old (or will be by the date of the next election);
- Not be in prison or on parole for a felony conviction;<sup>1</sup>
- Not be told by a court that you cannot register to vote.

4. Can I ask my regional center to help me register to vote?

Yes. If you ask the regional center to help you, they must help you. This is the law. If you have not registered to vote yet and you want to register to vote, call your regional center service coordinator (case manager) and ask for help. The regional center can help you get a Voter Registration Card. If you want help filling out the card, the regional center can help with that too.

5. Can my regional center help me register to vote at my house?

Yes, the regional center can help you register to vote at your house.<sup>2</sup>

6. Can my regional center refuse to help me register to vote?

No, the law requires that the regional center help you. If you need and want help, the regional center has to help you. For example, the regional center cannot say they will not help you register to vote because they think your parents will not like it or that they think you are too disabled to vote, etc. If you are eligible to register to vote (see requirements in Number 3 above), it is not the regional center's (or anyone else's) decision. It is YOUR decision whether you want to register to vote or not. If you are eligible and want to register to vote

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<sup>1</sup> Other reasons include: not serving a state prison sentence in county jail, not serving a sentence for a felony pursuant to subdivision (h) of Penal Code section 1170, or not on post release community supervision.

<sup>2</sup> 42 U.S.C. 1973gg-5(a)(4)(B).

and you need help, the regional center must help you. This is required by law.

7. What can I do if the regional center does not give me a Voter Registration Card or does not want to help me register to vote?

If the regional center service coordinator does not want to give you a Voter Registration Card when you ask for one, or does not want to help you fill out the card when you ask for help, you can file a complaint with the Secretary of State's office by calling: 1-800-345-8683 (voice and TTY). You can also call Disability Rights California at 1-800-776-5746 (voice) 1-800-719-5798 (TTY) for help.

8. Can I register to vote even if I'm on probation?

Yes, you can register to vote even if you are on probation.

9. When do I have to re-register to vote?

Some examples of when you have to register to vote again are when you:

- Move to a new address;
- Change your name;
- Change your political party;
- Got back your right to vote after getting out of prison or getting off parole;<sup>3</sup>
- Got back your right to vote after getting off a conservatorship that suspended your right to vote.

10. Where can I get a Voter Registration Card?

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<sup>3</sup> See also footnote 1.

There are many places you can get a Voter Registration Card. You can go to your regional center to pick one up or ask your regional center service coordinator (case manager) to mail a Voter Registration Card to you. If you need help filling it out, the regional center has to help you. Please see Questions 4-7. If you don't know where your regional center is located, you can go to this website to find out: <http://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/RCList.cfm>.

For a listing of other places where you can get a Voter Registration Card, see Disability Rights California publication "Voters with Disabilities" at: <http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/pubs/541201.htm>.

11. What is the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and how does it help me to register to vote?

In 1993, Congress passed a law called the National Voter Registration Act.<sup>4</sup> It is also called "NVRA" or "Motor Voter Act" for short. One of the reasons for this law was to make it easier for people, including people with disabilities, to register to vote.

A major requirement of NVRA is that each State designates certain agencies as "Voter Registration Agencies."<sup>5</sup> Voter Registration Agencies ("VRA") include:

- All offices in the State that provide public assistance; and
- All offices in the State that provide State-funded programs primarily engaged in providing services to persons with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

12. Are regional centers considered a Voter Registration Agency?

Yes, because regional centers are State-funded and provide services to persons with disabilities, regional centers were designated by the

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/42usc/subch\\_ih.php#anchor\\_1973gg](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/42usc/subch_ih.php#anchor_1973gg)

<sup>5</sup> 42 U.S.C. sec. 1973gg-5.

<sup>6</sup> 42 U.S.C. sec. 1973gg-5(a)(2)(A)-(B).

State as a VRA. To see a list of agencies, including regional centers, that the State has designated as VRAs, go to:

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/nvra/voter-reg-agencies/vr-agency-contact-roster.htm>.

13. As a VRA, what is the regional center required to do?

The regional center, as a designated VRA, must do all of the following:

- Give you a Voter Registration Card:
  - At the time you apply for services or request assistance from the regional center;
  - When you update your Individual Program Plan;
  - When you move and the regional center knows you will have a change of address.
- Help you fill out the Voter Registration Card if you need and want help;
- Take the completed Voter Registration Card and mail or deliver it to the appropriate elections officials if you want it to be mailed for you;
- Regional centers must give you a form called a Voter Preference Form. This form asks you if you would like to register to vote and lets you know that you can get help with registration. It also lets you know that you have the right to register or not and to pick your own political party preference. The regional center keeps the Voter Preference Form for two years.

14. I heard about a new voting law called SB 35. What is this law and what does it do?

A new law (Senate Bill (SB) 35) went into effect on January 1, 2013.<sup>7</sup> SB 35 says the State has to follow the requirements of the NVRA and it also sets out additional requirements. SB 35 requires VRAs, like regional centers, to do the following:

- Notify the county elections official of each county where regional center offices are located and get Voter Registration Cards from those counties;
  - Take steps to ensure that each regional center office has enough Voter Registration Cards and Voter Preference Forms, including in all the languages that are covered by that county;
  - Ensure employees that help with voter registration, like service coordinators, receive training at least once a year on how to help clients with voter registration and how to comply with requirements of NVRA and SB 35;
  - Appoint one staff person at each regional center to be in charge of NVRA and SB 35 requirements.
15. When I'm registering to vote, can the regional center tell me what political party I should choose?

No, that is entirely your decision. The law does not allow a VRA like the regional center to:

- Influence or tell you which political party you should choose;
- Display or show that they prefer one political party over another;
- Say anything to you or take any action to discourage you from registering to vote; or

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/sen/sb\\_0001-0050/sb\\_35\\_bill\\_20120924\\_chaptered.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/sen/sb_0001-0050/sb_35_bill_20120924_chaptered.html)

- Say anything to you or take any action to make you think that registering or not registering to vote will affect your services.<sup>8</sup>

If your regional center service coordinator does any of the above, you can file a complaint with the Secretary of State by calling: 1-800-345-8683. You can also call Disability Rights California at 1-800-776-5746 (voice), 1-800-719-5798 (TTY) for help.

16. Where can I go to get more information about voting and NVRA/SB 35?

There are several places where you can get more information about your voting rights. Often, they have useful publications with more information. They include:

- Disability Rights California Voting page:  
<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/pubs/PublicationsVoting.htm>
- Secretary of State's Office's NVRA site:  
<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/nvra/>
- Your county elections office:  
[http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections\\_d.htm](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_d.htm)
- Easy Voter Guide:  
<http://www.easyvoterguide.org/>

*Disability Rights California is funded by a variety of sources, for a complete list of funders, go to <http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/Documents/ListofGrantsAndContracts.html>.*

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<sup>8</sup> 42 U.S.C. 1973gg-5(a)(5).