

Washington's New Voter Registration Laws

The 2018 legislature passed a number of pro-democracy bills, including three that directly impact voter registration. LWV WA actively lobbying in support of all these bills.

Briefly they are:

- **HB 1513** preregistration, will allow for 16 and 17-year-olds to preregister to vote at any location where voter registration occurs or through electronic means. Effective 7/1/19.
- **SB 6021** Same Day Voter Registration, allows a citizen to register to vote any time before 8pm on the day of an election. Effective 6/30/19.
- **HB 2595** Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), will expand the number of registered voters by having state agencies register those who have proven citizenship. Effective 7/1/19.

Preregistration for 16 and 17-year-olds

Washington's new Future Voter Program allows 16 and 17-year olds to pre-register to vote before they turn 18. A qualifying Future Voter can preregister online, by mail, through the DMV or in person and will be added to the voter rolls with a "pending" or "pre-registration" status. Upon turning 18, the individual will have their pending status removed and will be able to cast a ballot.

Timeframe: Future Voters can preregister any time after their 16th birthday until eight days before the first election after their 18th birthday.

Impact on League work:

This is the new law that will most directly impact LWV Voter Service work. We can begin asking any citizen over 16 to complete a voter registration form **starting on July 1, 2019**, the day the law officially goes into effect. King County Elections has started accepting registration forms from 16 and 17-year-olds now. It is possible that other counties will accept them earlier, please check with your County Auditor.

Of course, this law gives us great opportunity to do **voter registration in high schools**. Leagues can arrange visits to high schools at any time that school officials agree to. Under this law Washington public schools are **required** to give eligible young people the opportunity to pre-register to vote once a year, on *Temperance and Good Citizenship Day*, January 16th or the proceeding Friday. County elections officials are encouraged to conduct voter registration events in high school on that day, but of course they cannot be everywhere. This day presents a special opportunity for Leagues to work with their county election and school officials to do voter registration and pre-registration drives.

Voter registration forms from anyone under 18 have **some special requirements**. The information contained on them is not considered public information, unlike information from adults. That means paper forms absolutely must not be copied, nor any contact information retained from them. It is also important that completed forms be delivered to the elections office or mailed as soon as possible after being collected. If they were to be lost or stolen, we would not only be legally liable, but we would've exposed a minor's private information.

Same Day Registration

Same-Day Registration is a new policy that allows eligible Washingtonians to register and vote up to Election Day **at in-person voting centers**. This common-sense policy makes registering to vote less complicated by eliminating unnecessary registration deadlines. In most counties the only voting center required is at the county auditor's office. King County, due to its size will be required to have an additional voting center in presidential election years.

Timeframe: 7 days before the election until 8 PM on election day.

Impact on League work:

We will not be able to register people on election day. Our role will be one of **education and facilitation**. Local Leagues may also want to consider offering to drive people to voting centers for them to both register and vote on during this time.

We can begin education about this option any time, but it is important to make a strategic decision as to **when to proactively inform voters** about it. If we do it early in the election cycle there is some risk that people will decide to procrastinate on registering to vote, knowing that they can do it up until the last minute. Complications on that day could result in their missing the opportunity to vote. The fact is it is much more convenient to register online more than eight days before an election than to wait until election. But once that 8-day deadline for online or mail in voter registration passes it is certainly appropriate for local Leagues to remind voters of this option.

Automatic Voter Registration

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) gives eligible voters an accessible, modern, and secure way to register to vote when they interact with certain state agencies. Those agencies will automatically add those who have proven citizenship to the voter rolls unless they “opt out.”

Beginning July 2019, the Department of Licensing will automatically register Washingtonians applying for or updating an **enhanced** driver’s license, which requires proof of citizenship. Voters will be informed about the automatic registration process given the opportunity to “opt out.” The Health Benefit Exchange will provide a pre-filled registration form using information sourced from their HBE account. Users will be given the option to “opt in” to registration and have their completed form submitted to the Secretary of State’s office.

LWVWA is working with the Governor’s office extend AVR to others who interact with Health and Human Services agencies.

Timeframe: 8 days before an election.

Impact on League work:

While this is an extremely valuable tool in getting more eligible voters registered, it will not reach everyone. Its current implementation is limited it will not be an option for most potential voters.

One of our members from Horizon House very creatively wrote to her legislators asking them to pass AVR so that it could put us out of the voter registration business. As important as this legislation is, **the world still needs LWV voter registration volunteers!**

The Washington Secretary of State provides a guide to registering voters. As of this printing it has not been updated to reflect the new laws but I’m confident it will be by July 1. You can find it here: bit.ly/voteguideWA

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