

VOTING 101

Voting Glossary

Ballot

The official document you use to vote. It lists the candidates and any issues you can vote on.

Ballot Drop Box

A secure location where you can return your mail-in ballot by hand. Ballots must be dropped off by the deadline on Election Day to count.

Board of Elections

The government agency that oversees elections. Maryland has a State Board of Elections and local boards in each county, including Baltimore City.

Early Voting

A period before Election Day when you can vote in person at designated locations.

Election Day

The final day you can cast your ballot. In Maryland, polls are open from 7am–8pm (if you're in line by 8pm, you can still vote).

General Election

The election where voters choose who will hold public office. It follows the primary election.

Mail-In Voting (Formerly Absentee Voting)

A way to vote from home, which involves requesting a ballot in advance. Your completed ballot must be returned by mail (postmarked by Election Day) or placed in an official drop box by the deadline.

Party Affiliation

The political party you choose when you register to vote. In Maryland, your affiliation determines which party's primary election you can vote in.

Polling Place

The location where you go to vote in person.

Postmark

An official mark that USPS places on mailed items when they're processed. Mail-in ballots must be postmarked on or before Election Day to count.

Primary Election

An election where political parties choose their candidates for the general election.

Provisional Ballot

A ballot used when there's a question about a voter's eligibility at the polling place. It's reviewed after Election Day and counted once eligibility is confirmed.

Same-Day Registration

The option to register to vote at a polling place, as long as you meet eligibility requirements.

Sample Ballot

A preview of what your ballot will look like before you vote. It lets you review candidates and issues in advance.

Voter ID

Identification you may need when registering or voting, depending on your situation. Requirements vary, so it's best to check ahead of time.

Voter Registration

The process of signing up to vote. You must be registered before casting a ballot in Maryland.