



May 29, 2020

Re: Election Mail

Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Postal Service anticipates that many voters will choose to use the mail to participate in upcoming elections, including the 2020 General Election in November. This letter is a follow-up communication to the 2020 Official Election Mail Kit (Kit 600), which was provided to elections officials in March and which is available at <https://about.usps.com/kits/kit600.pdf>.

Following up on several topics addressed in that Election Mail Kit, this letter highlights some key aspects of the Postal Service's delivery processes, to allow you to take those processes into account when making decisions and when educating the public on what to expect when using the mail to vote. You will also find some additional recommendations that the Postal Service has regarding how to ensure the efficient and timely handling of mail pertaining to elections (which includes ballots as well as registration cards, absentee-ballot applications, polling-place notifications, or other materials sent from authorized election officials to allow citizens to participate in the voting process, and is collectively referred to as "Election Mail"). These and other issues are discussed in the above mentioned Election Mail Kit and in Publication 632, *State and Local Election Mail – User's Guide*, which is enclosed to this letter. Publication 632 and other Election Mail resources are available on the Postal Service's Election Mail website at <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/election-mail-resources.htm>.

### **How Election Mail can be Sent**

As an initial matter, the Postal Service offers a variety of mailing services that voters and election officials may utilize to transmit Election Mail. The two main classes of mail that are used for Election Mail are First-Class Mail and USPS Marketing Mail, the latter of which includes the Nonprofit postage rate. These mail classes have different delivery standards and price ranges, and are subject to eligibility requirements that include the volume of a given mailing and the mailpiece's contents, weight, and size. As a general matter, all Election Mail (including ballots) mailed from individual voters to state or local election officials *must* be sent by First-Class Mail. Election materials (including blank absentee ballots) mailed from state or local election officials to voters may generally be sent by either First-Class Mail or Marketing Mail.

### **Mail Processing Times Need to be Considered when Communicating Deadlines**

It is important to note that First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail have different delivery standards, and that delivery times further depend on the origin and destination of a given mailpiece. Most domestic First-Class Mail is delivered in 2-5 days. Most domestic Marketing Mail is delivered in 3-10 days. *However, the Postal Service cannot guarantee a specific delivery date or alter standards to comport with individual state election laws.*

To account for delivery standards and to allow for contingencies (e.g., weather issues or unforeseen events), voters should mail their return ballots at least 1 week prior to the due date established by state law. Similarly, for election materials (such as blank ballots) sent to voters, the Postal Service also recommends that state or local election officials use First-Class Mail and allow 1 week for delivery to voters.

It is critical that the Postal Service's delivery standards be kept in mind when informing voters how to successfully participate in an election using the mail, and when state and local election officials are making decisions as to the establishment of deadlines and the means used to send a piece of Election Mail to voters. Voters should be made aware of these transit times when offered the opportunity to request that an absentee ballot be mailed to them, and when deciding when to mail a ballot back to election officials. For example, if a state law requires completed ballots to be received by election officials by a specified date (such as Election Day) in order to be counted, voters should be aware of the possibility that completed ballots mailed less than a week before that date may not, in fact, arrive by the state's deadline. Similarly, if a state law allows a qualified voter to request an absentee ballot shortly before Election Day and requires the state or local election official to mail that ballot to the voter, voters should be made aware that the absentee ballot may not reach the voter before Election Day if requested less than a week before the election.

### **Proper Labeling Helps Avoid Delivery Delays and Increases Mailpiece Visibility**

The Postal Service is committed to the efficient and timely processing and delivery of Election Mail in accordance with its delivery standards, and has developed labeling to provide greater visibility for these mailpieces during processing, including the Official Election Mail logo, which is used on all Election Mail, and Tag 191, *Domestic and International Ballots*, which is used specifically for ballots. Neither Tag 191 nor the Official Election Mail logo is mandatory, and they do not upgrade service or substitute for postage, but they help to alert the Postal Service of the presence of Election Mail in the postal network and distinguish Election Mail from the millions of other mailpieces that are moving through the network.

The Postal Service further recommends that election officials use Intelligent Mail barcodes for their Election Mail. These barcodes are used to improve a mailer's ability to track individual mailpieces and gain greater mailstream visibility. The Postal Service also offers an Intelligent Mail barcode identifier specifically for ballots that increases mailpiece visibility within the processing system, is used by the Postal Service to sort individual mailpieces, and can be used both by the Postal Service and by the mailer to track the delivery and return of ballots.

### **Consult with Election Mail Coordinators BEFORE Printing Mailpieces**

In addition, the Postal Service has assigned election mail coordinators to each locality that stand ready to assist and consult with state and local election officials concerning the logistics of their mailings and the services that are available. A list of election mail coordinators may be found on our website at: <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/political-election-mail-coordinators.pdf>. Also, mailpiece design analysts will assist election officials in designing and preparing envelopes that are consistent with postal regulations, increase

mailpiece visibility, facilitate the application of postmarks, and allow officials to receive available postage discounts. You may reach a mailpiece design analyst by calling the MDA Customer Service Help Desk at 855-593-6093 (between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday) or by sending an email to [MDA@usps.gov](mailto:MDA@usps.gov). Mailpieces that do not adhere to the Postal Service's requirements may experience longer processing times or other delivery problems. To avoid incurring delivery delays and unnecessary costs, the Postal Service strongly recommends that state and local election officials work with the Postal Service **before** designing and printing any mailpieces for use in elections.

This letter, which has been sent to local and state election officials around the country, is part of a broader outreach effort aimed at educating all interested parties about the Postal Service's mailing requirements and services. The Postal Service is proud of its role as an important component of the nation's democratic process and it remains committed to providing the resources needed to implement a successful election season.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas J. Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "T".

Thomas J. Marshall

Enclosure