

## Frequently Asked Questions: USPS Final Rule on Ballot Mail for Federal Elections

### The Rule

- **What is the U.S. Postal Service's Final Rule on Ballot Mail for Federal Elections?**

The USPS [Final Rule](#) on Ballot Mail for Federal Elections is a rule made available for public inspection on August 21, 2026, and formally published in the Federal Register on August 26, 2026. It adds a new section to the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM), a Postal Service regulation that establishes mailing standards for domestic mailing. The new rule establishes certain mail preparation and data-reporting requirements regarding absentee or mail-in ballots for general, special, or run-off federal elections.

- **Why was the USPS rule issued?**

On March 31, 2026, the President issued Executive Order 14399, Ensuring Citizenship Verification and Integrity in Federal Elections. Following the issuance of the Order, on June 2, 2026, the Postal Service submitted a proposed rule regarding the preparation of ballot mail for federal elections to facilitate the enforcement of federal law and to implement best practices for Postal Service operations regarding ballot mail, and received a large number of comments in response, including from election officials, officeholders, election-related organizations, postal unions, other advocacy groups, and the general public. USPS carefully reviewed and considered those comments prior to issuing the Final Rule. The Postal Service has determined that, to help achieve the goals articulated by the Order as necessary to faithfully execute federal law and also to advance the Postal Service's operational interests, it is appropriate to exercise its statutory authority to promulgate these provisions.

- **When will the rule take effect?**

As stated in the rule, the rule became effective on August 21, 2026. Given the terms of two injunctions that were issued prior to the Final Rule taking effect, the rule also notes that the Postal Service would not take actions to implement the Rule for the November 3, 2026, or any earlier federal election unless and until the government obtained timely relief from those injunctions. The government subsequently received such relief from those injunctions, meaning the injunctions no longer preclude implementation of the Rule for the November 3, 2026, or any earlier federal election. The Postal Service is currently defending the legality of the Final Rule in pending litigation and will update this document as necessary.

- **Are "absentee or mail-in ballots" different from Ballot Mail?**

They are the same for the purposes of the Final Rule. Both Executive Order 14399 and the Final Rule use the term "absentee or mail-in ballot." The Final Rule defines that term to mean "a physical ballot, other than a ballot provided at a designated polling place, that may be used to cast a vote in a federal election."

- **Does the Final Rule cover Ballot Mail for state elections?**

If a mailpiece contains a ballot that will be used solely for state or local elections, it is not subject to the Final Rule. However, if a mailpiece contains a ballot that is used for any federal election, including a ballot that is used for both state and federal elections, it will be subject to the Rule. *Federal election* means any general, special, or runoff election for the office of President or Vice President; or of Senator or Representative in, or Delegate or Resident Commissioner to, the Congress.

- **Does the Final Rule cover primary elections?**

No. The Final Rule does not cover ballot mail for any primary election.

- **Are all ballots for federal elections covered by the Final Rule?**

No. Ballots covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act ([52 U.S.C. 20301](#) *et seq.*) are not covered by the Final Rule.

- **Does the Final Rule cover all election-related mail?**

No. The Final Rule covers Federal Ballot Mail only. It does not include non-ballot Election Mail, such as voter registration cards, absentee voting applications and polling place notifications. It also does not cover UOCAVA ballots, ballot mail for primary elections, or ballot mail exclusively for non-federal elections.

- **The Postal Service itself has stated that it has delivered election mail securely and efficiently in past elections, so why is this rule necessary?**

The Final Rule is intended to facilitate the enforcement of federal law and advance operational best practices for the preparation of ballot mail, by providing mailpiece preparation and data reporting standards. The rule does not impact USPS practices concerning the handling and delivery of ballots for federal elections after the Postal Service accepts them into the mailstream.

## **Impacts**

- **Does this rule mean that the Postal Service decides who can vote by mail?**

No. States retain full control over who is eligible to vote, whether a voter is eligible to receive a ballot by mail under state law, and whether a ballot will be counted.

- **Are there any circumstances under which USPS will reject Outbound Federal Ballot Mail under the rule?**

Yes. Outbound Federal Ballot Mail—meaning a mailpiece sent from an authorized ballot mailer to an individual voter that contains a mail-in or absentee ballot for a federal election—will be rejected if during verification prior to acceptance the Postal Service cannot match the unique Intelligent Mail® barcode on the envelope with the data in the Federal Ballot Mail Portal. This means that these ballots would not enter the mailstream

and would not be delivered. States or their authorized mailers may correct any errors and resubmit an Outbound Federal Ballot mailing for acceptance.

- **Will USPS accept Return Federal Ballot Mail pieces (completed ballots) from voters that are mailed back to election offices using existing USPS collection methods?**

Yes. Once the Outbound Federal Ballot Mail reaches a voter, the voter will not experience any change under the Final Rule. If a voter chooses to return their completed ballot using the mail, they should use the Federal Return Ballot Mail envelope provided by their state, and may continue to use their residential mailbox, a blue collection box, or any retail counter. The Postal Service will then process and deliver the mailpiece consistently with current operational practices.

- **Are you changing how you process and deliver Election Mail?**

No. Once the mail is accepted, it is handled as before. The Final Rule does not make changes to the Postal Service's longstanding practices for processing and delivery of ballots, including completed ballots mailed by voters back to election offices. The Final Rule's envelope-design requirements, which track the Postal Service's best practices recommendations, facilitate efficient operations, proper handling, and timely delivery.

## **The Federal Ballot Mail Portal**

- **What information will be entered into the Federal Ballot Mail Portal?**

The Final Rule requires the chief election officials of individual states (or their designees) to enter into the Portal certain information about the absentee or mail-in ballots they plan to mail, including:

- Recipient Name
- Recipient Address
- Recipient's Unique Outbound Intelligent Mail Barcode
- Recipient's Unique Return Intelligent Mail Barcode
- Issuing State

This information must be submitted to the Postal Service through a Federal Ballot Mail Portal before Outbound Federal Ballot Mail is presented to the Postal Service for acceptance and mailing.

- **Will the Postal Service change the information that state officials enter into the Federal Ballot Mail Portal?**

No. The Postal Service will verify that the information is complete, but the Postal Service will not alter the information provided by the chief state election official of each state or their designees.

- **Will the Postal Service compare the information entered into the Federal Ballot Mail Portal with other federal databases or lists? And will the Postal Service**

**change any information in the Portal based on information in other federal databases or lists?**

No. The Federal Ballot Mail Portal is the sole data source used to verify Outbound Federal Ballot Mail prior to acceptance and to generate the state-specific Mail-In and Absentee Participation Lists that the Postal Service will provide to the state's chief election official. The List will not be based on external sources of information, such as federal databases. It will be based exclusively on the information provided by each state's chief election official or their designees. The Postal Service will not compare Portal data to any other internal or external source or change the information on its own.

- **How will permissions and access be managed for the Federal Ballot Mail Portal? How will officials grant access to subsequent users?**

The chief election official of each state will control user access to the Portal for their state. Any user—including local election officials and those who help local officials prepare mailings—must be approved by the chief election official before they can create an account and access the Portal.

The Portal will not be available to the general public, and one state's entries will not be accessible by any other state.

- **How will USPS keep voter data safe?**

The Postal Service manages one of the world's largest technology networks and has a long history of protecting customer data. We follow standards set forth by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), which meet the security guidelines of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the National Coordinator for Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience.

The Postal Service will not make state-specific Mail-In and Absentee Participation Lists public.

- **Who is providing user technical support for the Federal Ballot Mail Portal?**

The USPS Mailing and Shipping Solution Center at 1-877-672-0007 (7:00 am – 7:00 pm Central Time) will provide answers to customer service questions regarding use of the Federal Ballot Mail Portal, with USPS Technology Applications experts supporting.

## **Cost and Resources**

- **The Postal Service has publicly stated the seriousness of its strained financial situation. How can it afford to implement changes to acceptance of Outbound Federal Ballot Mail?**

The Postal Service is able to implement the rule, consistent with its legal obligations and available resources.

- **What tools are available to assist election officials with generating unique Intelligent Mail barcodes?**

The Postal Service offers a number of resources to help election officials and their mail service providers get started with unique Intelligent Mail barcodes, including:

- Intelligent Mail Small Business Tool - <https://gateway.usps.com/eAdmin/view/knowledge?securityId=IMSB>
- Intelligent Mail® Barcode Technical Resource Guide - <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/221>
- Steps to Create the Intelligent Mail® Barcode - <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/219>
- Barcode Resources - [https://postalpro.usps.com/IMb\\_Resources](https://postalpro.usps.com/IMb_Resources)
- Software and Fonts - <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/encoder-software-and-fonts>
- State and Local Election Mail User's Guide - <https://about.usps.com/publications/pub632.pdf>
- Official Election Mail Guide (Kit 600) - <https://about.usps.com/kits/kit600.pdf>

Election officials may also contact their Manager, Customer Relations (MCR) for more information about available Postal Service resources. MCRs can be found at <https://about.usps.com/what/government-services/election-mail/pdf/managers-of-customer-relations.pdf>

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