

## **Voting in California: A Guide for Voters with Disabilities and the People Who Help Them**

(September 2026)

### **Introduction**

This guide is a PDF<sup>1</sup> version of a website Disability Rights California (DRC) intends to create in the future. While the website is being made and while voting is underway for the November 2026 general election, we wanted to make sure California voters with disabilities and the people who help them have access to this valuable information. This guide mirrors the content and structure of the website that will be available in the future. It includes links between different sections of this document and also links to other webpages. (However, unlike a website, it unfortunately does not have a “back” button, which makes it a bit less smooth to use, and we apologize for that.) We hope you find the guide helpful in its current form, and we look forward to bringing you the fully functional website, with even more information, in 2027.

If you have any questions or feedback about this guide, please contact Karie Lew, voting rights attorney, at [VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org](mailto:VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org). In addition, please see our [legal disclaimers and other notes about contacting DRC](#) at the end of this guide.

### **What kind of help are you looking for? (table of contents)**

Welcome to our guide! This section of the guide is like a table of contents. (It would be the homepage of the website.) From here, you can link to all of the other information in the guide.

The information in this guide is mainly based on California law and applies to people who are [eligible to vote in California](#). If you vote in another state's elections, your jurisdiction may have different rules and options.

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<sup>1</sup> PDF stands for Portable Document Format. [\(Return to main document\)](#)

Please choose an option below that matches what you are looking for.

- I want to [talk to a voting rights attorney or advocate about my specific situation](#).
- I want to [write my own voting plan](#) using a template that helps me think through things like registering to vote, using the ballot that is mailed to me, voting at an in-person voting location, and/or getting assistance with voting.
- I want to understand the options and resources available to help me vote as . . .
  - [a person who is blind, has low vision, or has another condition affecting my vision](#).
  - [a person who is D/deaf or hard of hearing](#).
  - [a person who has difficulty walking, standing, or otherwise getting around](#).
  - [a person who has difficulty with activities that require manual dexterity](#), like writing, signing my name, and/or holding objects.
- I want to learn more about<sup>2</sup> . . .
  - [accessibility aids at in-person voting locations](#) (handheld magnifiers and signature guides).
  - [alternative formats for election materials](#).
  - [ballot delivery to my home or the facility where I am staying](#).
  - [ballot-marking devices / voting machines](#).
  - [ballot-tracking](#).
  - [curbside voting](#).
  - [“early voting”](#) (voting before Election Day).
  - [giving someone else permission to pick up a ballot and deliver it to me](#).
  - [giving someone else permission to return my ballot](#).
  - [the holes punched in ballot return envelopes](#).
  - [magnifiers](#).

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<sup>2</sup> The topics listed here are in alphabetical order by the way we have chosen to describe them. If you do not see the topic you are looking for in this list, you might consider doing a keyword search of this guide. ([Return to main document](#))

- [online voter registration.](#)
- [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\).](#)
- [replacement ballots.](#)
- [the right to receive assistance with voting.](#)
- [“signature curing.”](#)
- [signature guides.](#)
- [signing my ballot return envelope.](#)
- [videos about voting that include American Sign Language \(ASL\).](#)
- [voting using the ballot that is \(or was\) mailed to me.](#)

### **Voting hotline for Californians with disabilities**

Disability Rights California’s voting hotline provides free help to people with disabilities who are [eligible](#) (or who believe they should be eligible) to vote in California.

We answer questions about voting and provide other types of voting-related help to people who are eligible for our services. We commonly help people with disabilities to understand their voting rights and options, and we advocate to elections officials to enforce the rights of people with disabilities.

You can reach our voting hotline at (888) 569-7955.

Our voting hotline operates year-round. For most of the year, we are available Monday through Friday during Disability Rights California’s normal business hours (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), excluding holidays. On Election Day for every statewide election in California, we are available during voting hours (7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.).

We try to answer most calls at the time they come in. However, if we are unable to pick up, we ask that you leave a message with the following information:

1. Your name
2. The name of the voter (if you are calling on behalf of someone else)
3. Your phone number
4. A brief description of the reason you are calling

Because we get more calls the closer it gets to Election Day, we encourage you to call as soon as you know you have a question or problem. That will make it more likely we can help you in a timely manner.

If you want to reach Disability Rights California about something other than voting, please see our [general “Get Help” webpage](#) for options and instructions.

### **Resources for voters who have disabilities that affect their vision**

If you are blind, have low vision, or have another condition that affects your vision, here are some options and resources that might help you to vote. These resources are listed in alphabetical order.

- **Accessibility aids at in-person voting locations:** All voting locations in California are required to have [handheld magnifiers and signature guides](#).
- **Assistance from another person:** Learn more about your [right to receive assistance with voting](#).
- **Audio versions of election materials:** Audio is one type of [alternative format](#).
- **[Ballot delivery to your home or the facility where you are staying](#):** If your disability prevents you from going to an in-person voting location and you don’t have any other way to vote, county elections officials might be able to deliver a ballot (or bring a [ballot-marking device](#)) to where you are.
- **[Ballot-marking devices / voting machines](#):** These machines have features that are helpful to many people who have disabilities that affect their vision.

- **Braille versions of election materials:** Braille is one type of [alternative format](#).
- **[Curbside voting](#):** This service allows you to vote outside of your voting location, without having to go inside.
- **Holes punched in your ballot return envelope to help you feel where to sign your name:** These [holes](#) might be helpful to you if you vote using the ballot that is mailed to you.
- **Large-print versions of election materials:** Large print is one type of [alternative format](#).
- **Online versions of election materials:** These could be helpful if you are able to use assistive technology, such as a screen reader, or other tools on your computer or smartphone to access them. See the section about [alternative formats](#) for more information.
- **Online voter registration:** [Registering to vote online](#) allows you to use your own assistive technology to complete and submit the application.
- **Remote accessible vote-by-mail (RAVBM):** [RAVBM systems](#) provide a way for you to access and mark your ballot on your own internet-connected device, such as a computer or smartphone. They are compatible with assistive technology, such as screen readers.
- **Signing your ballot return envelope with a witnessed mark rather than your name:** If you want to vote using the ballot that is mailed to you but you are concerned your ballot might not be counted because you cannot sign your name or your disability affects your signature, signing with a witnessed mark might be a good option for you. This option is described in the section about [signing your ballot return envelope](#).
- **Signing your ballot return envelope with a signature stamp:** If you want to vote using the ballot that is mailed to you but you are concerned your ballot might not be counted because you cannot sign your name or your disability affects your signature, using a signature stamp might be a good option for you. This option is described in the section about [signing your ballot return envelope](#).
- **[Voting using the ballot that is mailed to you](#):** This might be your best option if your disability makes it difficult to leave your home or the facility where you are staying.

If you want to talk to a voting rights attorney or advocate about your specific situation, we invite you to call our [voting hotline](#). (This service is for people with disabilities who are [eligible](#)—or who believe they should be eligible—to vote in California.)

## **Resources for voters who are D/deaf or hard of hearing**

If you are D/deaf or hard of hearing or have another condition that affects your hearing, here are some options and resources that might help you to vote. These resources are listed in alphabetical order.

- **American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation:** County elections offices vary significantly in their plans for how to provide assistance to people who need or prefer to communicate using ASL. Some have arrangements with in-person ASL interpreters and/or ASL-fluent staff, while others plan to rely mostly on video remote interpreting (VRI) services. Some provide ASL services at all in-person voting locations, while others provide ASL services at select locations and/or only during certain dates and times. To request that assistance be provided in ASL and to find out what services are available in your area, we recommend that you contact your [county elections office](#) as far in advance as possible. (Note that the California Secretary of State provides a phone-based interpretation service to county elections offices. Some elections officials who are unfamiliar with sign languages have mistakenly believed that this phone-based service would be helpful to D/deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, so you may need to be prepared to respond to this type of misunderstanding when requesting ASL interpretation.)
- **Assistance from another person:** Learn more about your [right to receive assistance with voting](#).
- **Video resources that include American Sign Language (ASL) and/or captions**
  - Learn more about video resources generally in the section about [alternative formats for election materials](#).
  - Click [here](#) for links to voting-related videos that include ASL.

If you want to talk to a voting rights attorney or advocate about your specific situation, we invite you to call our [voting hotline](#). (This service is for people

with disabilities who are [eligible](#)—or who believe they should be eligible—to vote in California.)

## **Resources for voters who have disabilities affecting their mobility**

If you have a disability or other condition that affects your ability to walk, stand, or otherwise get around, here are some options and resources that might help you to vote. These resources are listed in alphabetical order.

- **Assistance from another person:** Learn more about your [right to receive assistance with voting](#).
- **[Ballot delivery to your home or the facility where you are staying](#):** If your disability prevents you from going to an in-person voting location and you don't have any other way to vote, county elections officials might be able to deliver a ballot (or bring a [ballot-marking device](#)) to where you are.
- **[Curbside voting](#):** This service allows you to vote outside of your voting location, without having to go inside.
- **[Giving someone else permission to pick up a ballot and deliver it to you](#):** This is an option whether you are at home or elsewhere.
- **Remote accessible vote-by-mail (RAVBM):** [RAVBM systems](#) provide a way for you to access and mark your ballot on your own internet-connected device, such as a computer or smartphone, without having to leave your home or the facility where you are staying.
- **[Voting using the ballot that is mailed to you](#):** This might be your best option if your disability makes it difficult to leave your home or the facility where you are staying.

If you want to talk to a voting rights attorney or advocate about your specific situation, we invite you to call our [voting hotline](#). (This service is for people with disabilities who are [eligible](#)—or who believe they should be eligible—to vote in California.)

## **Resources for voters who have disabilities affecting their manual dexterity**

If you have a disability or other condition that causes difficulty with activities requiring manual dexterity, like writing, signing your name, and/or holding objects, here are some options and resources that might help you to vote. These resources are listed in alphabetical order.

- **Assistance from another person:** Learn more about your [right to receive assistance with voting](#).
- **[Ballot-marking devices / voting machines](#):** These machines have features that are helpful to people who have disabilities that affect their manual dexterity.
- **Online versions of election materials:** These could be helpful if you are able to use assistive technology on your computer or smartphone to access them, rather than having to use paper materials. See the section about [alternative formats](#) for more information.
- **Online voter registration:** [Registering to vote online](#) allows you to use your own assistive technology to complete and submit the application.
- **Remote accessible vote-by-mail (RAVBM):** [RAVBM systems](#) provide a way for you to access and mark your ballot on your own internet-connected device, such as a computer or smartphone. They are compatible with assistive technology.
- **Signature guides:** All voting locations in California are required to have tools that can help guide where you sign your name. See the section about [accessibility aids](#) for more information.
- **Signing your ballot return envelope with a witnessed mark rather than your name:** If you want to vote using the ballot that is mailed to you but you are concerned your ballot might not be counted because you cannot sign your name or your disability affects your signature, signing with a witnessed mark might be a good option for you. This option is described in the section about [signing your ballot return envelope](#).
- **Signing your ballot return envelope with a signature stamp:** If you want to vote using the ballot that is mailed to you but you are concerned your ballot might not be counted because you cannot sign your name or your disability affects your signature, using a signature

stamp might be a good option for you. This option is described in the section about [signing your ballot return envelope](#).

If you want to talk to a voting rights attorney or advocate about your specific situation, we invite you to call our [voting hotline](#). (This service is for people with disabilities who are [eligible](#)—or who believe they should be eligible—to vote in California.)

## **Using the rest of this guide (and how it is organized)**

While you are welcome to read the rest of this guide in the order in which the information appears below, we strongly recommend finding the information you need by using the section above called “[What kind of help are you looking for? \(table of contents\)](#).” Once this guide is made into a website, the sections below should be separate webpages that are linked from other webpages. For now, the sections appear in alphabetical order based on the main topic (but not necessarily the first word in the section heading).<sup>3</sup> If you do not see the topic you are looking for in the “[What kind of help are you looking for? \(table of contents\)](#)” section, you might consider doing a keyword search of this guide.

## **Accessibility aids at in-person voting locations**

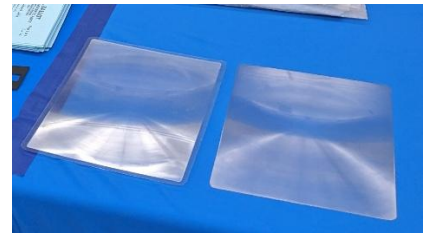
All voting locations in California are required to have the following two types of tools available to you, in case they would help you during the voting process:

1. **Handheld magnifiers:** These tools might help you to see the text on your ballot and/or other election materials. They come in different

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the first four sections below are alphabetized based on the words “accessibility aids,” “alternative formats,” “American Sign Language (ASL),” and “assistance.” [\(Return to main document\)](#)

styles, including plastic sheets and tools with handles. Here are some examples:



2. **Signature guides:** These are plastic or metal tools that help a person figure out where to make their signature. The guide is placed under or around the place where the signature goes, and the person making their signature can see and/or feel where they should sign. This type of tool can be helpful when signing in for voting. Here are some examples:



Other tools might be available at your voting location as well. For example, Disability Rights California often recommends that county elections officials offer grips that can be wrapped around pens to make them easier to hold for people who have disabilities that affect their manual dexterity. Examples of green pen grips appear in one of the photos directly above. Here is another example:



## **Election materials in alternative formats**

Some election materials are available in what are called alternative formats, which basically means a form other than the standard print version that usually is used or has been used in the past. Alternative formats can include the following:

- **Audio**
  - Some audio versions can be streamed or downloaded from the internet.
  - Some audio versions are saved to physical media, such as a compact disc (CD) or cassette tape, which might be mailed to you or available for you to borrow from a library.
- **Braille**
- **Electronic version** accessible in Portable Document Format (PDF), through a word-processing program like Microsoft Word or Google Documents, or through a [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#) system
  - Electronic versions of many election materials are available online.
  - Sometimes elections officials can email you electronic versions.
  - Electronic versions should be compatible with assistive technology on your computer or smartphone, such as a screen reader, and should allow you to do things like zoom in to increase the text size.
- **Large print**
- **Video**
  - Some videos include captions.
  - Some videos include American Sign Language (ASL).

**State voter information guide:** The state voter information guide contains general information that applies to all California voters, candidate statements for state offices, and information about statewide ballot measures. The California Secretary of State makes the state voter information guide available in multiple formats, including [online](#), large print,

and audio, in addition to mailing a standard print version to voters. The online version typically has links to the following options:

- PDF versions in multiple languages (For example, [here](#) is the English PDF version for the November 2026 general election.)
- [Audio versions](#) that can be streamed or downloaded, in multiple languages
- [Videos that include American Sign Language \(ASL\) and spoken and written English](#), covering a limited number of sections of the state voter information guide
- Order forms for having the following formats mailed to you:
  - [Large print](#), in multiple languages
  - [Audio on compact disc \(CD\)](#), in multiple languages

**County voter information guides:** County voter information guides contain information specific to voting in that county, such as lists of voting locations and ballot drop boxes for that county, candidate statements for county and local offices, and information about county and local ballot measures. In addition to mailing a standard print version to voters, some county elections offices put their voter information guides on their websites. You also may be able to access your county voter information guide through your county's [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#) system. Contact your [county elections office](#) to ask what alternative formats are available.

**Ballots:** The ballots that are put into counties' tabulation machines to be counted are all standard paper versions. If you cannot see, mark, and/or handle a standard paper ballot, here are some other ways you might be able to access your ballot:

1. Mark your ballot using a voting machine at an in-person voting location. The voting machine has features that make voting accessible for people with disabilities, including audio instructions and navigation, braille on a handheld controller, and a touchscreen that can be used for increasing the text size and color contrast. Click [here](#) to learn more about voting machines, also called ballot-marking devices.

2. Mark your ballot using a remote accessible vote-by-mail (RAVBM) system on your own personal device. RAVBM systems are compatible with assistive technology, including screen readers. Click [here](#) to learn more about the features of RAVBM systems and their limitations.
3. Request a large-print version of your sample ballot, which is a sample that appears in the county voter information guide in some counties. Mark your selections on your sample ballot, and submit your sample ballot (instead of your official ballot) to your elections officials. Your elections officials will copy your selections from your sample ballot onto an official ballot that can be read by the tabulation machine.

Some alternative formats will be made only if you request them as a “reasonable accommodation” for your disability, so make sure to plan ahead and submit your request early to your [county elections officials](#).

### **Voting-related videos that include American Sign Language (ASL)**

This section includes links to videos we know about that include ASL.

#### **Videos from Disability Rights California (DRC)**

- [How to return the ballot that is mailed to you](#)
- [Signing your ballot return envelope](#)
- [ASL version of our “Make a plan for successful voting!” resource](#)

#### **Videos from the California Secretary of State’s office**

- [California Voter Bill of Rights](#) (made for the June 2026 election)<sup>4</sup>
- [How to register to vote](#) (made in 2021)
- [“Assistance for Voters with Disabilities”](#) (made for the June 2026 election)

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<sup>4</sup> It appears the Secretary of State’s office did not update these videos for the November 2026 general election. ([Return to main document](#))

- [Voting using the ballot that is mailed to you](#) (made for the June 2026 election; while the specific dates do not apply to later elections, the general descriptions are still accurate)
- [Remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#) (made for the June 2026 election)

## Videos from county elections offices

- **San Benito County**
  - [Using the County's video remote interpreting \(VRI\) service, called Multilingual Virtual Pollworker \(MVP\)](#) (2024)
- **Santa Clara County**
  - [How to register to vote](#) (January 2022)
  - [How to vote in person](#) (January 2022)
  - [How to vote by mail](#) (March 2022)
  - [How to vote using the remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\) system](#) (January 2022)
  - [How to register to vote and vote: for military and overseas voters](#) (January 2022)
- **Stanislaus County**
  - [Lifecycle of a vote-by-mail ballot and how ballots are counted](#) (ASL added in 2026)
  - [Voting at a vote center](#) (ASL added in 2026)
- **Yolo County**
  - [Voter education workshop \(10/2/24 recording\)](#) (ASL interpreter was present at the event)

If you know of a helpful video that should be added to this section, please let us know by emailing [VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org](mailto:VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org).

## Your right to receive assistance with voting

As a person with a disability, you have a right under federal and California law to receive help with voting from one or more people you choose. The help you receive can be with any part of the voting process, from registering to vote to traveling to a voting location to [getting](#), reading, marking, and [returning](#) your ballot. The only people who are not allowed to provide this help are your employer, someone who is acting on behalf of

your employer, and (if you are in a union) someone who is acting on behalf of your union.

Anyone who helps you with your ballot is required to keep how you voted private. This means they cannot tell other people which candidate you picked or whether you voted “yes” or “no” on a ballot measure, such as a statewide proposition.

If you think you might need or want help with voting, think about who you trust and whether they are likely to be available to help you. For example, you might ask a family member, a friend, a professional caregiver or attendant, a neighbor, or another member of a group you belong to. If you are voting from home or at a facility, such as a hospital or nursing home, you can receive help there. If you want to vote at an in-person voting location, you can bring your helper(s) with you. Elections officials and staff also are available to help you.

### **Giving someone else permission to get your ballot and deliver it to you**

If your ballot was mailed to you but you don’t have it with you at the time you want to vote with it, here are a few options to consider. These options often are helpful when a voter is temporarily away from home and at a facility, such as a hospital, nursing home, or rehabilitation center.

1. If you know where your ballot is and someone you trust can get it for you, you could ask for their help. This is part of your [right to receive assistance with voting](#), and there are no special steps you need to take. A common example is giving a friend or family member the key to your home and asking them to go and get the ballot for you.
2. If someone you trust is available to help you but you’re not sure where your ballot is or it’s not possible for them to pick up the ballot that already was mailed to you, they can get another ballot for you

from your county elections officials. To use this option, you and your trusted person must take the following steps:

- a. You must complete the [“Application to Provide Vote-By-Mail Ballot to Representative”](#) form. This form is required by law.
  - i. If you need the form in another language, you can check for that language on the California Secretary of State’s [“Voting By Mail”](#) webpage, under the heading “Application to Provide Vote-by-Mail Ballot to Representative.”
  - ii. The online version of the form is a fillable Portable Document Format (PDF) form, but it must be printed on paper. If you don’t have access to a printer, contact your [county elections office](#) to request a paper version of the form. If you have a disability that prevents you from using paper effectively, please call our [voting hotline](#) to see if we can help.
  - iii. You must sign the form to say that you are the one requesting that your ballot be provided to your trusted person, who will then deliver the ballot to you. (Your trusted person is called your “representative” on the form.) If you cannot sign your name, you can instead sign the form with a witnessed mark, following similar procedures as those described [here](#) for ballot return envelopes; there is a place on the form for a witness’s signature.
- b. Your trusted person must take the completed form to one of your county elections officials. Check with your [county elections office](#) for specifics on where and when the form can be submitted and your ballot can be picked up.
- c. Your trusted person must sign the form in front of an elections official at the time they pick up your ballot. By signing the form, they are saying that they received your ballot.
- d. Once your trusted person delivers your ballot to you, you should treat it like any other [mail ballot](#).
  - i. [This video](#) describes your options for returning your ballot.
  - ii. Click [here](#) for more information about signing your ballot return envelope.

3. Consider whether [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#) might work for you. (Although this option is not about giving someone else permission to get your ballot for you, which is the main subject of this section, RAVBM is listed here because it may be useful in the same kinds of situations that the other options are.)
4. If you cannot use any of the three options described above, you can [explore whether your county elections office can deliver a ballot to you where you are](#).

### **Ballot delivery to your home or the facility where you are staying**

County elections officials might be able to deliver a ballot (or bring a [ballot-marking device](#)) to your home or the facility where you are staying (such as a hospital or rehabilitation center) and help you to vote if the following things are true:

1. Your disability prevents you from going to an in-person voting location, and
2. You don't have any other way to vote. This can mean:
  - a. You didn't receive a ballot by mail or you don't have it with you (for example, you didn't take it when you went to the hospital).
  - b. There is not enough time left before Election Day for elections officials to mail you a ballot.
  - c. There is no one else, such as a family member or friend, available to help you by [picking up a ballot and delivering it to you](#).
  - d. Even if you have a paper ballot where you are or you could receive one by mail before Election Day, your disability prevents you from being able to use it to vote.

This service requires a lot of resources. For that reason, it is not available in all counties. In addition, even in counties where it sometimes is available, you may be too far from the county elections office or staff may be too busy (especially as it gets closer to Election Day) to help you in this way.

If you are in this situation, we encourage you to call our [voting hotline](#) as soon as possible, to see if we can help you explore your options. You also can contact your [county elections office](#) directly.

## **Ballot-marking devices / voting machines**

A ballot-marking device (BMD) is a type of voting machine that allows a voter to read and mark their ballot on a computer at an in-person voting location. After the voter is finished making their ballot selections and reviewing them to make sure they are correct, the BMDs used in California then print the voter's selections on paper. That printout is what is used to count the votes.

While all voters in California are allowed to use the BMDs, these machines are especially important to people with disabilities, because they have features that enable people with disabilities to exercise their right to vote privately and independently. "Privately and independently" means these machines enable them to vote (1) without having to rely on another person to help them read and mark their ballot and (2) without having to reveal how they are voting to anyone else, protecting their right to cast a secret ballot. These features include:

- A touchscreen, with options to change the text size and color contrast on the screen
- A handheld controller with braille and buttons in different shapes (and sometimes different colors)
- Headphones for listening to an audio version of the ballot and audio instructions for navigating and marking the ballot electronically
- The ability to connect to other assistive technology, such as a sip-and-puff device or paddle switches

All voting locations in California must have a minimum number of BMDs. In [counties that run their elections under the California Voter's Choice Act](#), there must be at least three BMDs at each vote center. In other counties, there must be at least one BMD at each polling place.

California counties can choose from several different models of BMDs. Your [county elections office](#) can tell you which one they are using. Here are some resources to help you learn more about them:

- Election Systems & Software's ExpressVote
  - [Brochure with photo and description](#)
  - [Webpage describing the features that help voters with disabilities](#) (includes photos)
  - [Video demonstration made by National Federation of the Blind](#) (made in 2022; includes English captions; approximately 11 minutes long)
- Hart InterCivic's Verity Touch Writer
  - [Document with photo and simple instructions](#)
  - [Video demonstration made by National Federation of the Blind](#) (made in 2022; includes English captions; approximately 11.5 minutes long)
- Liberty Vote's ImageCast X (ICX)
  - [Brochure with photos and description](#)
  - [Video demonstration made by National Federation of the Blind](#) (made in 2022; includes English captions; approximately 12.5 minutes long)<sup>5</sup>
- Los Angeles County's Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP)
  - [Video from 2020](#) (description of the BMD begins around the 1-minute mark)

### **Giving someone else permission to return your ballot for you**

If you [vote using the ballot that was mailed to you](#) or a [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#) system but you need help returning your ballot to your elections officials, the law allows you to receive help. You can give your ballot, in the signed return envelope, to someone you trust, and that person is allowed to return it for you. Look for the place on the envelope where the person who is helping you should put their name and signature. Click [here](#) for more information about the right to receive assistance with voting.

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<sup>5</sup> At the time this video was made, Liberty Vote was called Dominion Voting Systems. ([Return to main document](#))

## **Ballot-tracking (BallotTrax)**

California has a free ballot-tracking service called BallotTrax. This service tells you when your ballot is mailed to you, when it is received by your elections official, and when it is counted—or, if it cannot be counted, the reason why and any steps you can take so that it is counted.

You can get automated notices by text message, email, and/or phone call.

If you signed up for notices by text message and/or email and your ballot cannot be counted because of a problem with your signature on the ballot return envelope, the notice will include a link to the form to use for fixing the problem. (For more information about signing a ballot return envelope, including fixing any problems with your signature on one, click [here](#).)

We strongly recommend signing up for this service. To sign up, go to [WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov](https://WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov), and enter your name, date of birth, and ZIP Code. You can select your notification preferences, and you can log back in to change them at any time. If you don't want to receive notices, you also can just log into the website to check for status updates.

Your BallotTrax log-in information must match the information in your voter record. If you have trouble logging in, you might try other versions of your name that could appear in your voter record. For example, we have noticed that BallotTrax sometimes has hyphenated last names as all one word without the hyphen.

## **Curbside voting**

Curbside voting is a service that allows you to vote outside of your voting location, without having to go inside. Election workers bring your ballot outside to you.

California law requires curbside voting to be available at all voting locations. Even though all voting locations in California are required to be physically accessible to people with disabilities, the purpose of curbside voting is to make voting easier for people with disabilities. Some disabilities can make it difficult to stand in line or go inside, and some people with

certain health conditions might feel safer staying outside rather than going inside, especially when viruses are circulating.

When you arrive at your voting location, look for signs that show you where to park for curbside voting and how to contact someone for help. In some counties, you have to call a phone number to request help. In other counties, there is a bell, like a doorbell, in the curbside-voting area for you to push to request help. Disability Rights California encourages all counties to assign an election worker to monitor the curbside-voting area for people who need help, especially because not every voter has a cell phone.

Most counties bring a paper ballot outside, but some have their [ballot-marking devices](#) (also called voting machines) on carts that they can wheel out to the curbside-voting area. If you would prefer to use a ballot-marking device to vote, ask if election workers can bring the machine outside to you. Here is the current list of counties where we know there are ballot-marking devices on carts at at least some voting locations:

- Los Angeles County
- Merced County
- Napa County
- Orange County
- Placer County
- Riverside County
- San Diego County
- San Mateo County
- Santa Clara County
- Stanislaus County

If you know of a county that should be added to this list, please let us know by emailing [VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org](mailto:VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org).

Here are some photos with examples of how curbside voting looks in various counties in California.



### **“Early voting”**

When people refer to “early voting,” they usually are talking about voting before Election Day. In California, we have “early voting” options for approximately one full month leading up to Election Day. These include opportunities to [vote using a ballot that is mailed to the voter](#) and to vote at

an in-person voting location. You can learn about the options in your county by reading the materials your county elections office sends to you, looking at your [county elections website](#), or contacting your [county elections office](#). You also can [look up options on the California Secretary of State's website](#).

### **Online voter registration**

Some voters might find online voter registration through the California Secretary of State's website ([RegisterToVote.ca.gov](https://RegisterToVote.ca.gov)) easier and more accessible than other methods of voter registration, such as using a paper application. As with other online tools, you should be able to use your own assistive technology, such as a screen reader, to navigate, complete, and submit the online voter registration application.

This online form is the same one you would use if you are registering to vote in California for the first time or updating your voter registration (for example, because your name changed or you have changed addresses within California). If you are not sure whether you need to update your voter registration, there is a link on the same page that allows you to check your voter registration status.

If you experience any accessibility barriers while trying to complete this online application, we encourage you to let the Secretary of State's office know; the numbers for the Secretary of State's voter hotlines, in multiple languages, are [here](#). In addition, we invite you to report any problems to us at Disability Rights California using our [voting hotline](#), because we regularly advocate to the Secretary of State's office for improvements that help voters with disabilities.

### **Remote accessible vote-by-mail (RAVBM)**

Remote accessible vote-by-mail (RAVBM) is the term for a type of system voters can use to obtain and mark an electronic version of their ballot on their own internet-connected device, such as a computer or smartphone. The term includes the words "vote-by-mail" because RAVBM systems are meant to be a different way to vote from home (or from another place

besides an in-person voting location). They are an alternative to voting using the paper ballot that is mailed to a voter.

Voters who want to use RAVBM must sign up for it. The way to sign up varies from county to county, so, if you want to use it, contact your [county elections office](#), check your [county's elections website](#), or see the materials your county elections office sends to you for instructions. Once you are signed up, you will log into your county's RAVBM system, where you will access a copy of your ballot. You will be able to vote on the same contests and measures that you would see on a paper ballot that is mailed to you. That includes being able to vote for write-in candidates.

RAVBM systems are compatible with assistive technology, like screen readers, which make them a good option for some voters with disabilities. Being able to read and mark their ballot on their own computerized device means that some voters with disabilities can complete these actions without having to rely on help from another person. This allows them to keep their ballot selections private.

One potential drawback of the RAVBM systems used in California, however, is that your ballot selections must be printed on paper and returned to your elections officials in paper form. That usually means the device you use to access the RAVBM system must be able to connect to a printer, and then you must have some way to get the printout of your ballot selections to your elections officials. You have the same options for returning this printout to elections officials as you do for returning any other paper ballot: depositing it in an official ballot drop box, taking it to an in-person voting location, or returning it by mail. (For more information about ballot return options, see the section about [voting using the ballot that is mailed to you](#).) If you do not have a way to print your ballot selections and/or return the printout to your elections officials, then RAVBM is not a good option for you, and we recommend that you explore other options. (One exception to this paragraph: Certain military and overseas voters are allowed to return their ballot selections by fax.)

Something else to keep in mind about using RAVBM: When you return your ballot selections, you must also submit your signature, as you would when returning any other paper ballot. There is a place for your signature on the ballot return envelope provided by your county elections office. If you don't

have that envelope, the RAVBM system should have a form you need to print, sign, and return in the same envelope with your ballot selections. Click [here](#) to learn more about the signature requirement.

RAVBM systems originally were for voters with disabilities, voters in the military, and voters who were outside the United States at the time of an election. Nowadays, any California voter is allowed to use their county's RAVBM system.

Click [here](#) to watch a two-minute video Disability Rights California made in 2018 to demonstrate what it looks like to mark a ballot on one of the RAVBM systems used in California.

## **Replacement ballots**

When people talk about “replacement ballots,” they usually are referring to providing a ballot to a voter after ballots already have been mailed to all active registered voters for a specific election. Such “replacement ballots” are treated like any other [mail ballot](#). They typically are called “replacement ballots” even if the voter never received the ballot that originally was mailed to them; that’s because, from the perspective of elections officials, any ballot issued after the first mailing is replacing a ballot that previously was issued, even if it wasn’t received by the voter.

Common reasons voters request “replacement ballots” are because they never received their ballot, they misplaced their ballot, they don’t have their ballot with them at the time they want to vote (for example, when they are in the hospital), or they made a mistake when marking their ballot and want a new one.

As a voter, you have the option of picking up a “replacement ballot” yourself. You can contact your [county elections office](#) to explore the best way(s) to submit your request and get your ballot. The California Secretary of State’s office has a [form for requesting a replacement ballot](#), which should be accepted by any county elections office. (If you need the form in another language, you can check for that language on the Secretary of State’s [“Voting By Mail”](#) webpage, under the heading “California

Replacement Ballot Application.”) Your county elections office might have a different form or other procedures that could help you.

You also can give permission to someone you trust to pick up a ballot, including a “replacement ballot,” for you. Click [here](#) to learn more about that option.

### **“Signature curing”**

If someone uses the term “signature curing” or a similar phrase when talking about voting, in most cases, they are simply using shorthand for the idea that there is a problem with the voter’s signature on a ballot return envelope, and the problem needs to be fixed (or “cured”) before the ballot can be counted. For more information about signing a ballot return envelope, including fixing any problems with your signature on one, click [here](#).

### **Signature-guide holes in ballot return envelopes**

A common question about the ballots that are mailed to voters is why there are holes in the ballot return envelope. Some people worry about these holes, but there is a simple explanation for them: They help make voting accessible to people with disabilities, and they also help ensure that your ballot is processed and counted.

Most ballot return envelopes in California have one or two holes punched through the paper near the area for the [voter’s signature](#). These holes are meant to be something that voters with vision disabilities can feel to know where to sign. Ideally, there will be one hole on either side of the signature area, so you know to sign in between the holes, but that is not always the case. These holes are required to be in the ballot return envelopes that are provided to people who vote using a [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#) system. Many counties provide the envelopes with the signature-guide holes to all of their voters, regardless of whether they vote using RAVBM.

The ballot return envelopes in some counties have one or more additional holes that are punched through both sides of the envelope, allowing a person to look all of the way through the envelope when there is nothing blocking the hole. County elections officials use these holes when they are processing ballots to make sure they didn't accidentally leave a ballot in an envelope when they are removing ballots from the envelopes. These holes help to make sure your ballot gets counted.

Here are some examples of how the holes might look:



Remember that the design of ballot return envelopes varies from county to county, so your envelope might look different.

## **Signing your ballot return envelope**

If you vote using the ballot that is mailed to you, you will be required to submit your signature at the same time. Your signature is what shows your elections officials that the ballot is yours—and that someone else didn't use your ballot.

There is a place on the ballot return envelope that asks for your signature. These envelopes look different from county to county, but many have a line or box that asks for the “voter’s signature” or tells you, as the voter, to “sign here.” Most envelopes also have one or two holes punched through the paper near the signature line or box. These holes are meant to be something that voters with vision disabilities can feel to know where to sign. Ideally, there will be one hole on either side of the signature area, so you know to sign in between the holes, but that is not always the case. (Click [here](#) to learn more about the signature-guide holes in ballot return envelopes.) You'll want to make sure you are signing in the place for the voter's signature and not in the space for giving someone else permission

to return your ballot. There is a lot written on the envelope, so take your time and look for the correct place to put your signature.

The signature on your ballot return envelope must match a signature in your voter record. Elections officials could have copies of your signature from your Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) record, your voter registration application, and/or signatures you gave during past elections. If your signature has changed over time, it's a good idea to update it in your voter record by submitting a new voter registration application using a paper form.

If you can't sign your name, the law allows you to **make a simple mark**, like an X, on the envelope where you would otherwise put your signature. In order for this mark to count as your signature, someone else must write both your name *and* their own name near the mark you make on the envelope. By doing this, they are saying they know that the person who made the mark on your ballot return envelope is you. The law calls this person a “**witness**.” They must be at least 18 years old. Many voters use a family member or friend as their witness. Some envelopes have a space that asks for the witness's information, but others do not. If your envelope does not have a specific place for the witness's information, your witness can just write it somewhere near the mark you made; we recommend that they write the word “Witness” next to their name, so it is clear why *their* name is on *your* envelope.

Another option when you can't sign your name because of your disability is to use something called a **signature stamp**. Under California law, a signature stamp is a stamp that looks like (a) your actual signature, (b) a mark or symbol that you have chosen for this purpose, or (c) your name as signed by someone else and adopted by you to substitute for your own signature. Signature stamps are a great option for some people with disabilities, but the rules for using them are a little more complicated.

- **Signature stamp option 1:** Your signature stamp must first be (a) used on a voter registration application in front of a county elections official or (b) approved by the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), transmitted to the California Secretary of State, and used on an online voter registration application. After you've done one of these two things, you can use the signature stamp yourself as

your signature on your ballot return envelope, and you also can allow someone else to use your signature stamp on your ballot return envelope while you are there with them.

- **Signature stamp option 2:** If you were not able to take the steps described above under “Signature stamp option 1,” you can still use a signature stamp to sign your ballot return envelope, but you have to follow the [rules for witnessed marks](#) that are described above. The impression left on the envelope by your signature stamp would be treated like a “mark,” and your witness would have to write both your name and their own name near that impression.

If you forget to sign your ballot return envelope or if elections officials think the signature on your envelope doesn’t look like the signature examples they have on file for you, you will have another chance to provide a signature that matches a signature in your voter record. Your elections officials must send you a notice about the problem and a form you can sign to say that ballot was yours. They also might contact you by phone, text message, or email, including by using [California’s free ballot-tracking service, BallotTrax](#).

If you are told there is a problem with your signature, it is very important that you follow the instructions for fixing it by the deadline, or else your ballot will not be counted. The notice will tell you what to do and the deadline. You can return the form by mail, email, or fax or by taking it in person to an elections official. Some counties also offer voters an online app as a convenient way of fixing problems with their signature. If you have any questions about why you received a notice about a problem with your signature or what you need to do to fix it, we encourage you to contact your [county elections office](#) right away to make sure your ballot gets counted.

Click [here](#) for the video we made about the requirement to sign your ballot return envelope.

## **Voting using the ballot that is mailed to you**

In California, if you are registered to vote far enough in advance of Election Day and your voter registration is active, a ballot will be mailed to you. County elections officials start mailing ballots to most voters approximately one month before Election Day. You do not have to use this ballot to cast your vote. Instead, you can go to an in-person voting location, where you can vote using a [voting machine](#) or a paper ballot that is given to you there. If you choose to vote using the ballot that is mailed to you, here are some things you should know.

In some counties, you can take just the ballot, without the ballot return envelope, to an in-person voting location and cast your mail ballot there as though the ballot had been given to you at that voting location (rather than mailed to you). If this is something you might want to do, we recommend that you contact your [county elections office](#) in advance to make sure it is a possibility in your county. Otherwise, you should follow the steps below to vote using the ballot that is mailed to you.

After you have marked your ballot selections, put the ballot in the ballot return envelope that was mailed to you with the ballot. If you share a home with other people who also received their ballots by mail, make sure you are using your envelope and not theirs. (Look for your name on the envelope.)

Once the ballot is inside the envelope, seal the envelope and sign it in the place that asks for your signature. Click [here](#) for more information about signing your ballot return envelope.

Once your ballot is inside the sealed and signed envelope, you have three options for returning it to your elections officials.

1. Put it in an official ballot drop box. You can search for nearby ballot drop boxes and see their days and hours of operation at [CAEarlyVoting.sos.ca.gov](https://CAEarlyVoting.sos.ca.gov). You also can find this information in the materials your county elections office mailed to you or on your [county's elections website](#). Ballot drop boxes usually open about a month before Election Day and close at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day,

but some have different hours of operation, so it's good to double-check.

2. Take it to an in-person voting location. The voting location most convenient to you may be called a vote center or polling place, or it may be the county elections office. You can search for nearby voting locations and see their days and hours of operation at [CAEarlyVoting.sos.ca.gov](https://CAEarlyVoting.sos.ca.gov). You also can find this information in the materials your county elections office mailed to you or on your [county's elections website](#). All voting locations close at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
3. Return it by mail. Your ballot must be postmarked no later than Election Day and received by elections officials no later than 7 days after Election Day. If you are using the mail to return your ballot, many elections officials recommend that you mail it back *at least a week before* Election Day, so that it gets postmarked and received on time. If you are mailing your ballot *on Election Day or in the few days before Election Day*, we recommend going into the post office and asking for a hand-stamped postmark, to be applied in front of you by a postal worker. However, if you're already planning to go to a post office (or to take your ballot to a blue U.S. Postal Service mail collection box), we recommend checking whether there is a ballot drop box or voting location that is just as convenient to you as that mailing option, because returning your ballot to a drop box or voting location means you don't have to worry about possible postmark and mail delays.

If you need help using any of these return options, the law allows you to receive help. You can give your ballot, in the signed return envelope, to someone you trust, and that person is allowed to return it for you. Look for the place on the envelope where the person who is helping you should put their name and signature. Click [here](#) for more information about the right to receive assistance with voting.

Click [here](#) for the video we made about ballot return options.

To receive updates on the status of your ballot, as it is mailed to you, received by your elections officials, and counted, we recommend signing up for [California's free ballot-tracking service, BallotTrax](#).

If you would like to vote from home (or from a facility where you are staying) and would like to explore the possibility of getting your ballot electronically, see the section about [remote accessible vote-by-mail \(RAVBM\)](#).

(Certain military and overseas voters might have different options than what is described in this section, because different laws apply to them. This section is not meant to describe those other laws.)

### **Legal disclaimers and contacting us**

The information in this guide was current at the time it was written. Laws and resources can change. If you find information in this guide that is out of date or if you have any suggestions about how we can improve this guide (and the website we plan to make based on it), please let us know by emailing [VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org](mailto:VotingWebsite@DisabilityRightsCA.org).

The information in this guide is intended to provide general education about these topics. It is not legal advice, and it does not create an attorney-client relationship between you and Disability Rights California (DRC). If you are looking for legal advice or representation related to voting, please call our [voting hotline](#). If you want to see if DRC can help you with any other issue, please call (800) 776-5746 or visit our [general "Get Help" webpage](#).