

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 621 Session of 2021

INTRODUCED BY MARKOSEK, N. NELSON, SANCHEZ, YOUNG, BIZZARRO, BURGOS, D. WILLIAMS, HOHENSTEIN, CIRESI, FREEMAN, McNEILL, SCHLOSSBERG, PISCIOTTANO, SCHWEYER, DRISCOLL, HOWARD, LEE, WEBSTER, HILL-EVANS, DELLOSO, MALAGARI, WARREN AND O'MARA, FEBRUARY 24, 2021

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, FEBRUARY 24, 2021

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of June 3, 1937 (P.L.1333, No.320), entitled  
 2 "An act concerning elections, including general, municipal,  
 3 special and primary elections, the nomination of candidates,  
 4 primary and election expenses and election contests; creating  
 5 and defining membership of county boards of elections;  
 6 imposing duties upon the Secretary of the Commonwealth,  
 7 courts, county boards of elections, county commissioners;  
 8 imposing penalties for violation of the act, and codifying,  
 9 revising and consolidating the laws relating thereto; and  
 10 repealing certain acts and parts of acts relating to  
 11 elections," in voting by qualified absentee electors,  
 12 providing for absentee ballots for electors who are blind,  
 13 visually impaired or disabled.

14 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
 15 hereby enacts as follows:

16 Section 1. The act of June 3, 1937 (P.L.1333, No.320), known  
 17 as the Pennsylvania Election Code, is amended by adding a  
 18 section to read:

19 Section 1303.1. Absentee Ballots for Electors Who are Blind,  
 20 Visually Impaired or Disabled.--(a) An elector who is blind,  
 21 visually impaired or disabled may request a special absentee  
 22 ballot available in braille.

1 (b) A request for a special absentee ballot under subsection  
2 (a) shall be made in writing to the county board of elections  
3 where the elector is registered at least forty-five (45) days  
4 prior to the election for which the elector is requesting the  
5 special absentee ballot. The request shall be valid for all  
6 elections held during the calendar year in which the request was  
7 received and in which the applicant is eligible to vote. An  
8 applicant shall file the appropriate absentee ballot application  
9 as required under section 1302 for each election in which they  
10 apply for a special absentee ballot.

11 (c) The Department of State shall prepare and provide the  
12 appropriate form, which shall be available at county boards of  
13 elections and upon request from the Department of State. An  
14 applicant may also choose to submit a request in writing without  
15 using the form provided if the communication contains all of the  
16 following information:

17 (1) The name and registered address of the qualified  
18 elector.

19 (2) A daytime telephone number.

20 (3) The elector's political party affiliation, if the  
21 request for a special absentee ballot is also for a primary  
22 election.

23 (4) An indication that the elector requests a braille  
24 absentee ballot.

25 (d) All requests received by county boards of elections  
26 shall be processed and forwarded to the Department of State  
27 within twenty-four (24) hours of receipt. A county board shall  
28 maintain a list of all individuals requesting special absentee  
29 ballots and shall forward a copy of the list to the Department  
30 of State at least eighteen (18) days before the date of an

1 election.

2 (e) The Department of State shall be responsible for the  
3 preparation and distribution of special absentee ballots. When  
4 possible, the Department of State shall prepare the special  
5 absentee ballot so that the voted ballot can be read by the  
6 tabulation equipment rather than being manually reproduced by  
7 election officials onto a machine-readable ballot.

8 (f) The Department of State may promulgate rules and  
9 regulations for the procedure for the manual reproduction of  
10 voted ballots, when necessary, and the tabulation of special  
11 absentee ballots.

12 (g) The Department of State may promulgate rules and  
13 regulations providing the procedure for the preparation and  
14 distribution of special absentee ballots.

15 (h) The Department of State shall prepare and publish a  
16 guide describing the manner in which a special absentee ballot  
17 can be voted. The guide shall be available in print, braille,  
18 audio or other accessible formats.

19 (i) The Department of State shall expand the special  
20 absentee ballot service to other electors with disabilities, as  
21 feasible, as determined by the Secretary of the Commonwealth,  
22 and incorporate other accessible formats as technology and  
23 resources allow.

24 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.