

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4691

By Delegates Anders, Coop-Gonzalez, and White

[Introduced January 21, 2026; referred to the

Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §3-1-4 and §3-3-1 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended,
2 relating to voting in the state; requiring that voting shall be by paper ballot; and providing
3 that only active members of the United States Armed Forces, which consist of six services:
4 the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, and the Coast Guard, or persons
5 who are handicapped and disabled may vote absentee ballots.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 1. GENERAL PROVISIONS AND DEFINITIONS.

§3-1-4. Manner of voting.

1 In all elections the mode of voting shall be by paper ballot, but the voter shall be left free to
2 vote by either open, sealed, or secret ballot, as he the voter may elect. Voting by ballot may be
3 accomplished as provided in §3-3-1 *et seq.*, §3-4-1-*et seq.*, §3-5-1-*et seq.*, and §3-4-6-*et seq.* of
4 this code.

ARTICLE 3. VOTING BY ABSENTEES.

§3-3-1. Persons eligible to vote absentee ballots.

1 (a) All registered and other qualified voters of the county may vote an absentee ballot
2 during the period of early voting in person.

3 (b) Registered voters and other qualified voters in the county are authorized to vote an
4 absentee ballot by mail in the following circumstances:

5 (1) Any voter who is confined to a specific location and prevented from voting in person
6 throughout the period of voting in person because of:

7 (A) Disability, illness, injury, or other medical reason;

8 (B) Physical disability or immobility due to extreme advanced age; or

9 (C) Incarceration or home detention: *Provided*, That the underlying conviction is not for a
10 crime which is a felony or a violation of §3-9-12, §3-9-13, or §3-9-16 of this code involving bribery
11 in an election;

12 (2) Any voter who is absent from the county throughout the period and available hours for
13 voting in person because of:

14 (A) Personal or business travel;

15 (B) Attendance at a college, university, or other place of education or training; or

16 (C) Employment which because of hours worked and distance from the county seat make
17 voting in person impossible;

18 (3) Any voter absent from the county throughout the period and available hours for voting in
19 person and who is an absent uniformed services voter or overseas voter, as defined by 42 U.S.C.
20 § 1973, *et seq.*, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986, including
21 members of the uniformed services on active duty, members of the merchant marine, spouses and
22 dependents of those members on active duty, and persons who reside outside the United States
23 and are qualified to vote in the last place in which the person was domiciled before leaving the
24 United States;

25 (4) Any voter who is required to dwell temporarily outside the county and is absent from the
26 county throughout the time for voting in person because of:

27 (A) Serving as an elected or appointed federal or state officer; or

28 (B) Serving in any other documented employment assignment of specific duration of four
29 years or less;

30 (5) Any voter for whom the designated area for absentee voting within the county
31 courthouse or annex of the courthouse and the voter's assigned polling place are inaccessible
32 because of his or her physical disability; and

33 (6) Any voter who is participating in the Address Confidentiality Program as established by
34 §48-28A-103 of this code.

35 (c) Registered voters and other qualified voters in the county are authorized to vote an
36 electronic absentee ballot in the following circumstances:

37 (1) The voter has a physical disability, as defined in §3-3-1a of this code;

38 (2) The voter is absent from the county throughout the period and available hours for voting
39 in person and is an absent uniformed services voter or overseas voter, as defined by 42 U.S.C. §
40 1973, *et seq.*, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986, including
41 members of the uniformed services on active duty, members of the merchant marine, spouses and
42 dependents of those members on active duty, and persons who reside outside the United States
43 and are qualified to vote in the last place in which the person was domiciled before leaving the
44 United States; or

45 (3) The voter is a qualified first responder called away on duty to respond to an emergency
46 outside the voter's county of residence, which prevents the voter from participating in the election
47 by in person and mail in absentee voting. For purposes of this section, "qualified first responder"
48 means a person with specialized training who arrives and provides aid at the scene of an
49 emergency, such as an accident, natural disaster, or act of terrorism. First responders typically
50 include emergency medical technicians, firefighters, law enforcement officers, neighborhood
51 assistance officers, and paramedics.

52 (d) Registered voters and other qualified voters in the county may, in the following
53 circumstances, vote an emergency absentee ballot, subject to the availability of the services as
54 provided in this article:

55 (1) Any voter who is confined or expects to be confined in a hospital or other duly licensed
56 health care facility within the county of residence or other authorized area, as provided in this
57 article, on the day of the election;

58 (2) Any voter who resides in a nursing home within the county of residence and would be
59 otherwise unable to vote in person, providing the county commission has authorized the services if
60 the voter has resided in the nursing home for a period of less than 30 days;

61 (3) Any voter who becomes confined, on or after the 7th day preceding an election, to a
62 specific location within the county because of illness, injury, physical disability, immobility due to
63 advanced age, or another medical reason: *Provided*, That the county clerk may require a written

64 confirmation by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse
65 that the voter meets the criteria of this subdivision before permitting such voter to vote an
66 emergency absentee ballot; and

67 (4) Any voter who is working as a replacement poll worker and is assigned to a precinct out
68 of his or her voting district, if the assignment was made after the period for voting an absentee
69 ballot in person has expired

70 Effective at the primary election in 2026, and thereafter for primary and general elections,
71 only active members of the United States Armed Forces, which consist of six services: the Army,
72 Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, and the Coast Guard, or persons who are
73 handicapped and disabled may vote by absentee ballots.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is requiring that voting shall be by paper ballot; and providing that only active members of the United States Armed Forces, which consist of six services: the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, and the Coast Guard, or persons who are handicapped and disabled may vote absentee ballots.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.