

# Voter Registration

## **The National Voter Registration Act**

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), widely known as “Motor Voter,” was signed into law on May 20, 1993 and took effect on January 1, 1995. Under the NVRA, Michigan must offer voters the opportunity to register to vote through the mail, motor vehicle offices, designated government agencies and military recruitment offices. The Secretary of State Branch Office Voter Registration Program, in operation since 1975, satisfies the motor vehicle office registration component of the federal law.

In addition, the NVRA prohibits city, township and village clerks from issuing a “cancellation notice” to a voter solely because of the voter’s failure to participate in elections.

## **Help America Vote Act**

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was signed into law on October 29, 2002. HAVA brought about a number of changes to the administration of elections and also made federal funding available to states for the purchase of new electronic voting systems. HAVA funding has allowed Michigan to replace outdated voting equipment and to improve polling place access for voters with disabilities.

The Help America Vote Act provides for the following:

- ***Provisional Balloting Process:*** The Provisional Balloting Process is designed to ensure that no voter is improperly denied the opportunity to vote due to an administrative error. The form (Procedure for Issuing a Ballot If Voter’s Name Does Not Appear on Registration List: A Four-Step Procedure.) allows a voter who does not appear on a precinct’s QVF list to vote once completed.
- ***First-Time Mail-in Registrants:*** A voter who has *never voted* in Michigan who chooses to register by mail must appear in person to vote in the first election in which he or she wishes to participate. In addition, “mail-in” voter registrants must provide acceptable proof of identity prior to being issued a ballot.
- ***Voter Registration Forms:*** Notices are provided on registration forms to ensure that voters are fully aware of the “voting-in-person” and federal ID requirements. Two questions regarding United States citizenship and the age of the applicant are also included on all registration forms.
- ***Public Posting Requirements on Election Day:*** HAVA expands the information that must be posted in the polls on Election Day. This requirement must be observed for every election conducted in the state.

- **Registration and Voter Rights of Absent Uniformed Services Voters and Overseas Voters:** Under HAVA, absent voter ballot requests submitted by absent uniformed service and overseas voters must be honored for two even numbered year election cycles. Each state is required to prepare and submit a report to the Election Assistance Commission regarding absent voter activities by overseas voters. In addition, local election officials must provide return notification to the applicant whenever voter registration or absent voter ballot applications are rejected.
- **Complaint Process:** Each state is required by HAVA to have in place a “uniform, nondiscriminatory state-based administrative complaint procedure” for federal elections. To conform to this stipulation a HAVA complaint process has been developed and adopted by the Department of State. Additional information is available on the Department of State’s Web site: [www.michigan.gov/sos](http://www.michigan.gov/sos).

## The Qualified Voter File

In operation since the 1998 election cycle, the Qualified Voter File (QVF) is a distributed database which ties Michigan’s 1,516 cities and townships to a statewide voter registration file maintained in Lansing.

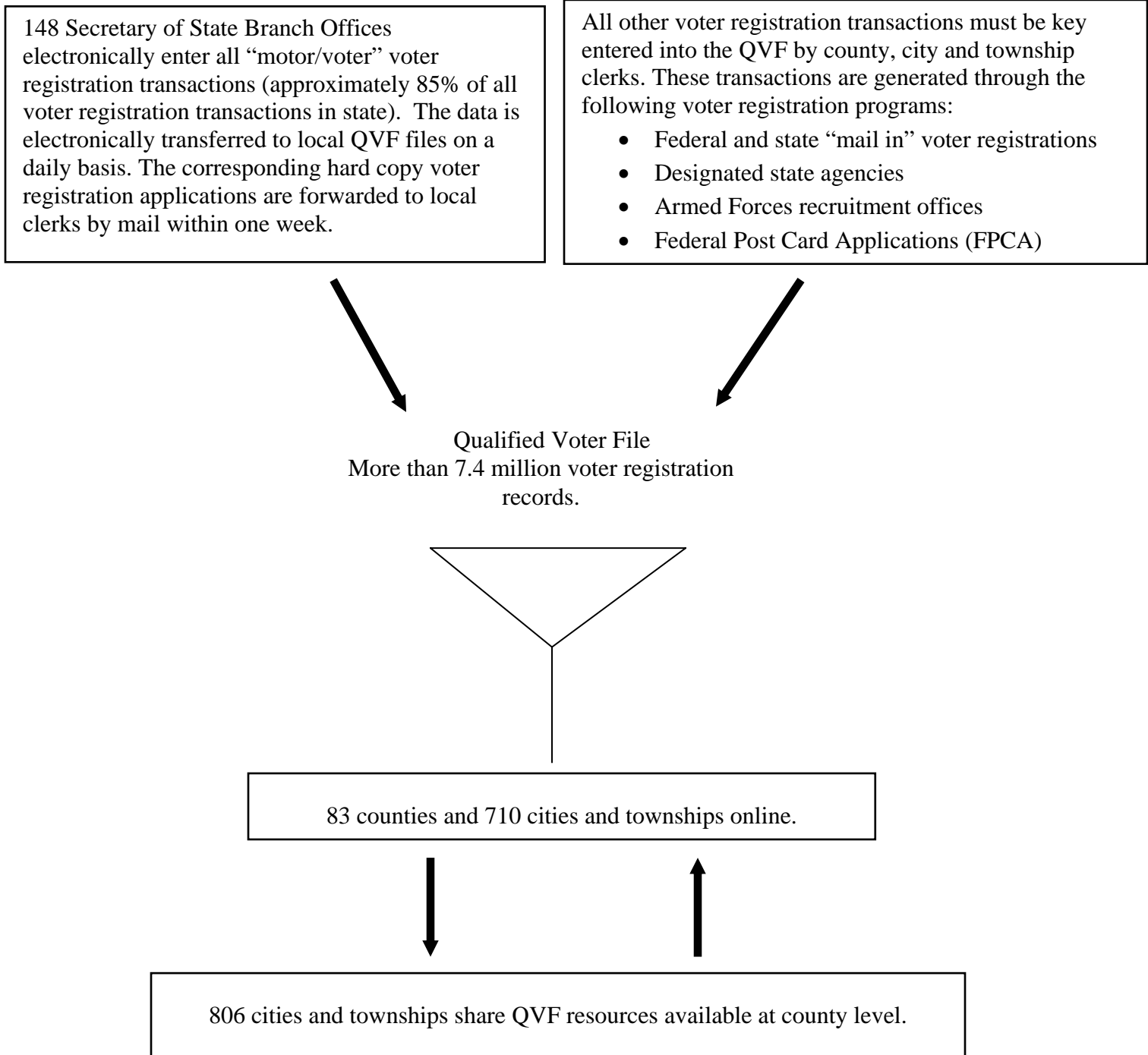
- With the QVF, each and every “motor/voter” registration transaction executed in a Secretary of State branch office is electronically forwarded to the appropriate local election official; a paper copy of the transaction follows within days to confirm the electronic notification and supply the election official with the voter’s signature.
- All voter registration records entered into the QVF system are matched to the state’s driver license file. When matches are found, the voter’s driver license record is flagged. This linkage permits the updating of both files regardless of whether the voter initiates a driver license address change or a voter registration address change.
- All drivers are required to use their registration address for driver license purposes. As a result, all voter registration address changes are automatically posted to the driver file. The Department supplies all voters who submit a new voter registration address an address change sticker for their driver license. Michigan is the *first* state to use voter registration address change data filed with local election officials to update driver license records.
- All voter registration application forms produced at Secretary of State Branch Offices are automatically printed with the voter’s name, address, date of birth and other data elements common to the voter’s driver license record. Individuals who change their driver license address to reflect a move to a *new* registration jurisdiction are automatically registered in their new jurisdiction of residence. Upon the receipt of the registration application, the clerk of the voter’s new jurisdiction of residence issues the voter a voter identification card to acknowledge the acceptance of the voter registration. The voter registration held by the voter in his or her former jurisdiction of residence is automatically canceled and the appropriate clerk is electronically notified of the cancellation.

- It is not necessary for a clerk who has direct access to the QVF to affix a signature to his or her master file records (master cards) for any voters who have a digitized signature in the QVF. In addition, in an instance where an *unsigned* branch registration form is received for a voter *who was previously registered in Michigan*, it is not necessary for a clerk who has access to a digitized signature in the QVF to mark the voter's record with a “Verify – Sign Registration Card” status code or capture the voter's signature prior to the issuance of a ballot.

It merits note, however, that an *unsigned branch registration form* forwarded for a *new voter who is registering to vote in Michigan for the first time* must be rejected as the voter failed to provide the minimum information required to complete the registration process. This remains true even in an instance where a digitized signature is provided for the individual. In this case, the voter must be sent a rejection notice and the voter's QVF status must be changed to “Reject – No Signature.”

- If a voter updates his or her driver license to reflect a move within his or her current jurisdiction, the voter's registration is automatically updated with the new address without any further action required on the voter's part. If the move was to a different precinct or district within the same jurisdiction, the clerk must send the voter an updated voter ID card.

## QVF Data Flow



## Sources of Voter Registration Applications

Voter registration applications can originate through any of the following sources:

- 1) Secretary of State Branch Office Voter Registration Program.
- 2) Secretary of State “Renewal by Mail” Program. (Allows Michigan citizens who are renewing their driver license by mail are offered the opportunity to register to vote by mail at the same time.)
- 3) Registration transaction in applicant’s county, city, township or village clerk’s office.
- 4) Mail Registration Program. (Includes the state mail-in voter registration application form and the federal mail-in voter registration application form.)
- 5) Designated government agencies including Michigan Department of Human Services and the Michigan Department of Community Health.
- 6) Armed Forces Recruitment offices.
- 7) Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) procedure.
- 8) Direct delivery of voter registration applications by persons working on behalf of voter registration drives. (The state and federal voter registration application forms developed to implement the Mail Registration Program are generally used by organizations involved in such efforts.)

## Mail-in Voter Registration Program

**Absentee Voting Restriction:** With the introduction of mail-in voter registration in the state, Michigan election law was amended under PA 441 of 1994 with the following restriction (MCL 168.509t(2)):

“A person who registers to vote in a jurisdiction in this state by mail shall vote in person if that person has not previously voted in person in any jurisdiction within the state. This subsection does not apply to any of the following registered voters:

“(a) A person entitled to vote by absentee ballot under the uniformed and overseas citizen’s absentee voting act, Public Law 99-410, 100 Stat. 924.

“(b) A person who has a handicap as defined in section 103 of the Michigan handicappers’ civil rights act, Act No. 220 of the Public Acts of 1976, being section 37.1103 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, or who is 60 years of age or older....”

Given the above restriction, a *new* registrant who submits a state or federal mail-in voter registration application form who has not previously voted in Michigan, is *not* eligible to

receive an absent voter ballot for the first election in which he or she wishes to participate unless the voter falls under one of the provided exemptions; the voter *must appear in person to vote*.

It merits note that the absentee voting restriction applies if the mail-in voter registration application form is delivered to the clerk's office by a third party; the restriction does *not* apply if the applicant personally delivers the form. It merits further note that the absentee voting restriction does *not* apply to electors who register to vote through authorized election assistants appointed under Michigan election law, MCL 168.29.

***Federal Identification Requirement:*** HAVA stipulates that a voter who has never voted in Michigan who chooses to register by mail must meet an identification requirement. To comply with the identification requirement, the voter must:

- 1) accurately enter his or her state issued driver license number or the last four digits of his or her social security number where requested on the mail-in voter registration form; or
- 2) send one of the following forms of identification when mailing the mail-in voter registration form to his or her county or local clerk: a copy of any current and valid photo identification or a copy of a paycheck, government check, utility bill, bank statement or a government document which lists his or her name and address.

If a voter subject to the federal identification requirement does not meet the requirement when registering, the voter must present one of the above listed documents before being issued a ballot at the first election in which he or she wishes to participate. The federal identification requirement does not apply if:

- 1) the voter hand delivers his or her mail-in registration form to the county or local clerk's office;
- 2) the voter is disabled; or
- 3) the voter is eligible to vote under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.

***Implementation Points:*** The following implementation points merit close attention:

- The QVF identifies those voters subject to the “voting-in-person” requirement (code: “MVIP”), those voters subject to the federal identification requirement (code: “ID”) and those voters who are subject to both requirements (code: “MVIP/ID”).
- A voter who is subject to the federal identification requirement who is unable or unwilling to produce an acceptable form of identification must be issued a “Provisional - Envelope” ballot. In this case, it is not necessary to complete the Four-Step Procedure form. It merits note, however, that a special notice must be issued to the voter at the time the “Envelope” ballot is issued. (Sample provided in *Appendix I*.)
- It merits final observation that in an instance where 1) a voter who is 60 years of age or more requests an absentee ballot 2) the voter is subject to the federal identification

requirement because he or she is a first-time mail registrant who has never voted in Michigan and 3) the voter has not met the identification requirement prior to requesting the absent voter ballot, a “Provisional- Envelope” ballot must be issued. If the required identification is not provided, the voted ballot must be preserved and processed as an “Envelope” ballot. It is recommended that in this case, the “Envelope” ballot not be delivered to the precinct or absentee counting board for processing on Election Day. For more information regarding the Provisional Balloting process see Chapter XI.

## **New Voter Registration Applicants**

***Receipt of Voter Registration Applications:*** Upon the receipt of a voter registration application, the clerk reviews the form to determine its acceptability. The absence of any of the following data on the form *invalidates* the application:

- 1) Name
- 2) Registration address (must be a street address or rural route number)
- 3) Birth date
- 4) Signature on qualification certificate, i.e., statement where voter attests that he or she has all of the necessary qualifications to register to vote. (Note: While a signature is required on voter registration applications submitted by *new voters who were not previously registered in Michigan*, a signature may not be required if the voter was previously registered in a different city or township in the state. See: Page 18, “*Processing Unacceptable Voter Registration Applications*” for details.)

In addition to the above, HAVA requires that all voter registration applicants answer the citizenship question that appears on all voter registration forms in the affirmative. If the voter answers the citizenship question by checking the “No” box, the application cannot be accepted. If the citizenship question is not answered, the voter must provide written affirmation that he or she is a U.S. citizen before a ballot may be issued. This requirement must be met each time the voter registers in a different city or township within the state. In some cases, proof of identification may also be required. (See: Page 16, “*Federal Identification Requirement*” for details.)

The following informational entries on the form are either optional or nonessential to the validity of the application:

- 1) Driver license or state personal identification number
- 2) Information on last place of registration
- 3) Gender
- 4) Birthplace

- 5) School district
- 6) County (assuming that the clerk is able to verify applicant's residence from stated address)
- 7) Jurisdiction of residence (assuming that the clerk is able to verify applicant's residence in jurisdiction from stated address)
- 8) Phone number
- 9) Any requested signature other than the signature requested on the qualification certificate

***Processing Acceptable Voter Registration Applications:*** If the voter registration application is acceptable, the clerk uses the information on the application to create the necessary voter registration records and forwards them as necessary:

- 1) Master Card. (May be generated from the QVF or may be manually prepared.)
- 2) Precinct List. (Must be generated from the QVF.)
- 3) Village Master Card, if required. (May be generated from the QVF or may be manually prepared by the township clerk. The card is then forwarded to the village clerk if the village conducts a September odd-year election.)
- 4) Voter ID card. (May be generated from the QVF or may be manually prepared.)

After creating and forwarding the necessary voter registration records, the clerk is required to prepare a voter identification card for the applicant which includes the applicant's name and registration address; Congressional, State Senate, State Representative and County Commissioner district numbers; precinct number; and polling place location.

The voter identification card must be mailed to the applicant's registration address by *nonforwardable mail*. The successful delivery of the voter identification card completes the registration process. *Exception:* If voter provides a post office box as an alternative mailing address, the voter identification card must be placed in an envelope which is addressed to the P.O. Box address. In this case, it is important that the alternative mailing address be entered into the QVF and on the voter's Master Card.

***Processing Unacceptable Voter Registration Applications:*** If the voter registration application is not acceptable, the clerk takes the following actions:

- If the signature on the qualification certificate is missing, and the voter *was not previously registered in Michigan*, the clerk arranges to have the applicant appear in person to sign the form or submit a replacement voter registration application on or before the close of registration for the first election at which the voter chooses to participate. The signature *may not* be obtained on Election Day. Change the voter's QVF status to "Reject – Signature" and send the voter a "Notice of Rejection" form.

However, if the voter *was previously registered* in Michigan, the signature must be obtained prior to the issuance of a ballot. In this case, the signature may be obtained on Election Day. Change the voter's QVF status to "Verify – Sign Registration Card." As mentioned earlier, if a city or township clerk has direct access to the QVF and a digitized signature is available, it is not necessary for the signature to be obtained prior to issuance of a ballot. If on the other hand a clerk does not have direct QVF access, the signature must be obtained prior to the issuance of a ballot.

In addition if the voter was not previously registered in Michigan and is using a mail-in application and does not provide one of the necessary acceptable forms of identification the QVF system will automatically give the voters the federal identification requirement code ID when entered by the clerk.

- If the registration application is unacceptable because it does not bear the applicant's full birth date or full residential address, the clerk attempts to contact the applicant by phone to obtain the required information.
- If the registration application is unacceptable because the applicant does not reside in the clerk's jurisdiction, the clerk forwards the application to the clerk of the appropriate jurisdiction. If the clerk is unable to determine the applicant's jurisdiction of residence, the clerk forwards the application to the Department of State's Bureau of Elections for review.
- If the clerk is unable to resolve the deficiency or forward the application as described above, the clerk "voids" the application. Upon taking this action, the clerk must forward a "Notice of Rejection" form to the applicant and change the voters QVF status to "Reject."

## **Transmission of Voter Registration Applications**

A Secretary of State branch office, designated voter registration agency or county clerk in receipt of a completed voter registration application is required to forward the application to the clerk of the county, city or township where the applicant resides *within seven calendar days*. If the receipt of the application occurs *within seven calendar days prior to the "close of registration" for an August primary or November general election*, the application must be forwarded to the clerk of the county, city or township where the applicant resides *within one business day*.

## **"Close of Registration" Standards**

An unregistered elector who wishes to participate in an upcoming election must register to vote no later than the 30<sup>th</sup> day prior to the election. (If the 30<sup>th</sup> day prior to the election falls on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday, the "close of registration" for the election is moved to the next business day.) Michigan election law specifies that a voter registration applicant who

meets any of the following standards has fulfilled the 30-day “close of registration” requirement for the next upcoming election:

- The elector submits a voter registration application through a Secretary of State branch office, a designated voter registration agency or a county, city, or township clerk’s office on or before the “close of registration” for the election.
- The elector submits a voter registration application through the mail and it is postmarked with a date that falls on or before the “close of registration” for the election. If the postmark date is missing or unclear, the voter registration application meets the “close of registration” for the election if 1) the clerk of the applicant’s city or township of residence receives the application within seven calendar days *after* the “close of registration” date *and* 2) the application is dated by the applicant on or before the “close of registration” for the election.

### **Address Change within Jurisdiction**

***Written Notice Provided by Voter:*** Upon the receipt of written notice *signed by a voter* that he or she has moved to a different address *within the same jurisdiction*, the clerk updates the voter registration files as appropriate and communicates the address change to the village clerk, if applicable. If the change is made through a Secretary of State branch office such notice will include the receipt of a voter registration application form showing the new address and will be preceded by a QVF “Changed Address To” inbox notification. Such changes may also be made through an “Election Day Change of Address Notice” executed by the voter at the polls; or a corrected voter identification card, letter, post card or post office change of address form signed by the voter announcing the address change.

After updating the voter registration files, the clerk prepares an updated voter identification card for the voter and mails it to the voter’s new address. Here, it is recommended that the updated voter identification card be sent by *nonforwardable mail with address correction requested*. If the voter identification card should subsequently be returned by the post office as “undeliverable,” the address correction can then be used to proceed as appropriate under “Address Change Within Jurisdiction: Written notice not provided by voter” or under “Move to a Different Jurisdiction: Written notice of voter’s registration in new jurisdiction of residence not provided.”

***Written Notice Not Provided by Voter:*** Upon the receipt of “reliable information” obtained through a “third party” source that a voter has moved to a different address *within the same jurisdiction*, the clerk updates the voter registration files as appropriate and communicates the address change to the village clerk, if applicable. “Reliable information” on such an address change would include a new address provided on returned mail; information supplied through a local utility; or notice provided through any similar source. After updating the voter registration files, the clerk prepares an updated voter identification card for the voter which lists the voter’s new registration address and marks the voter’s QVF registration record with a “Verify – Confirm Address” status code. The updated voter identification card is mailed by *forwardable mail along with a confirmation notice*. The confirmation notice, which contains a reply card, is used to confirm the voter’s current address within the jurisdiction.

If the voter returns the reply card attached to the confirmation notice to verify the address change or neglects to return the reply card, the clerk takes no further action. If the voter identification card and confirmation notice are returned by the post office as “undeliverable,” the voter’s status must be changed to “Challenged – Residency.” (See: “Returned Confirmation Notices” discussed later in this chapter.) If the voter returns the response portion of the confirmation notice stating that he or she has *not* moved to a different address, the clerk shall change the registration address back to the one used to address the confirmation notice.

## **Move to a Different Jurisdiction**

***Written Notice of Voter’s Registration in New Jurisdiction of Residence Provided:*** Upon the receipt of *written notice* that a voter has *registered to vote in another jurisdiction*, the clerk cancels the voter’s registration and communicates the action to the village clerk, if applicable. Such notice would include the receipt of a QVF inbox “Moved To” notification or a “Cancellation Authorization” form executed by the voter.

***Written Notice of Voter’s Registration in New Jurisdiction of Residence Not Provided:*** Upon the receipt of “reliable information” that a voter has moved to another jurisdiction *without any confirmation that the voter has reregistered to vote in his or her new jurisdiction of residence*, the clerk sends the voter a confirmation notice by *forwardable mail*. “Reliable information” on such an address change would include a new address in another jurisdiction provided on returned mail; information supplied through a local utility; an inbox notification indicating that the voter was issued a driver license in another state or notice provided through any similar source including the U.S. Postal Service or its licensees. A possible, but far less common source of such information would be a letter, post card or post office change of address form signed by the voter announcing the address change without any direction given on the desired disposition of his or her voter registration record. In this case, the clerk changes the voter’s QVF status to “Verify – Confirm Address.”

The confirmation notice, which in this case is referred to as a “Notice of Cancellation,” is used to confirm the voter’s address within a different jurisdiction. Additional language printed on the notice advises that the voter must respond within the next two statewide November general elections or their voter registration within the jurisdiction will be canceled. If the jurisdiction *has direct QVF access*, the “Cancellation Countdown” feature may be used to track the response timeframe. In this case, if no response is received and the timeframe expires, the voter registration is automatically canceled. If the jurisdiction *does not have direct access to QVF*, it is recommended that a “tickler” file be established to track the voter registration records that are subject to cancellation.

Once the record is cancelled, the date and reason for the cancellation is noted on the voter’s Master Card. The Master Card is then moved to the jurisdiction’s “cancellation file” where it is retained for 10 years beyond the year of cancellation.

- If the notice is *not* returned by the post office as “undeliverable” it is assumed that the notice was delivered.

- If the voter returns the reply card attached to the confirmation notice to verify that he or she has moved to another jurisdiction, the clerk cancels the voter’s registration.
- If the notice sent to the voter is returned by the post office as “undeliverable,” the voter’s status must be changed to “Challenged – Residency.” (See: “Returned Confirmation Notices” discussed later in this chapter.)
- If the voter appears to vote *in either of the next two statewide November general elections or any intervening election* and *claims that he or she did not move to an address outside the jurisdiction*, the “reliable information” on which the voter’s “Cancellation Notice” was based may have been erroneous. In this case, the voter is issued a ballot under normal procedure. The “Verify – Confirm Address” status code is automatically removed with the recording of vote history immediately following the election.
- If through the questioning of the voter it is determined that the voter *did move to an address that is outside of the jurisdiction*, the voter may not be entitled to a ballot. (See: Chapter XI “Voters Who Have Moved” for additional information.)
- However, if through the questioning of the voter, it is determined that the voter moved *within the same jurisdiction*, the election inspectors serving in the voter’s precinct direct the voter to complete an “Election Day Change of Address Notice.” Once the notice is completed and signed by the voter, a ballot is issued under normal procedure.

If no response is received over the course of the next two statewide November general elections, the voter’s registration is canceled without further notice.

## **Name Change**

Name changes must be made in person at a Secretary of State branch office. Upon the receipt of a name change, the clerk updates the voter registration files as appropriate and communicates the change to the village clerk, if applicable.

After updating the registration files, the clerk prepares an updated voter identification card for the voter and mails it to the voter’s registration address. Here, it is recommended that the updated voter identification card be sent by *nonforwardable mail with address correction requested*. If the voter identification card should subsequently be returned by the post office as “undeliverable,” any provided address correction is used to proceed as appropriate under “Address Change Within Jurisdiction: Written notice not provided by voter” or under “Move to a Different Jurisdiction: Written notice of voter’s registration in new jurisdiction of residence not provided.”

## **Addressing Confirmation Notices**

While the NVRA requires that confirmation mailings be sent to registrants by “forwardable mail,” it does not specify the address which must be used. In certain cases (such as when a

mailing to a registrant has been returned as “undeliverable” with no forwarding address), only one address will be available. In other cases (such as when a second address is supplied by the post office), two addresses will be available.

When faced with a choice of addresses, the advantage in mailing to the old address is that a registrant who has only *temporarily* changed addresses may not receive the mailing at the new address. A disadvantage to using the old address is that a registrant, who has, in fact, moved, may not receive the mailing through postal forwarding as post offices retain change-of-address records for a limited period of time (12 to 18 months). There are similar advantages and disadvantages in mailing to the new address: if the registrant has, in fact, moved, the notice will be received. If, on the other hand, the new address is in error, the registrant would never receive the mailing.

Given the above, it is recommended that in those instances where a local election official has both an “old address” and a “new address” for a registrant who must be sent a confirmation mailing, that the mailing be sent to both addresses.

## **Returned Confirmation Notices**

If a confirmation notice sent to a voter who has moved within his or her jurisdiction or to a voter who has moved to a different jurisdiction is returned by the post office as “undeliverable,” the following actions are taken:

- 1) The clerk marks the voter’s QVF registration record as “Challenged – Residency.”
- 2) Each election official must then instruct the election inspectors appointed to serve in the voter’s precinct on Election Day to question the voter on his or her residency status if the voter appears to vote. The voter *is not* required to provide documentation or proof of residence.
- 3) If the elector appears to vote and affirms that he or she resides at the new address within the jurisdiction or advises that he or she has moved to *a different address within the jurisdiction*, the election inspectors issue a regular ballot to the elector. In this case, the election inspectors further direct the voter to complete an “Election Day Change of Address Notice.” The completed notice is returned to the local clerk in a special envelope following the close of the polls. The new address is then entered into the QVF following the election and an updated voter identification card is forwarded to the voter that reflects the new information.
- 4) If the elector appears to vote and it is revealed under questioning at the polls that the elector is not qualified to vote in the jurisdiction, the election inspectors do *not* issue a ballot to the elector and the voter’s registration may be canceled. In this case the election inspector should place a note to this effect in the envelope addressed to the local clerk.
- 5) If the elector does not appear to vote *over the course of the next two, successive statewide November general elections*, the clerk cancels the voter’s registration. As noted above, if the jurisdiction has direct QVF access, the Cancellation Countdown

feature may be used to track the response timeframe. If no response is received and the timeframe expires, the voter registration is automatically canceled. If the jurisdiction *does not have direct access to QVF*, it is recommended that a “tickler” file be established to track the voter registration records that are subject to cancellation. In this case, the clerk makes arrangements to change the voter’s QVF status to “Cancel – Residence.”

Once the record is cancelled, the date and reason for the cancellation is noted on the voter’s Master Card. The Master Card is then filed into the jurisdiction’s cancellation file where it is retained for 10 years beyond the year of cancellation.

## Returned Voter Identification Cards

***Voter Identification Card Returned:*** If a *voter identification card* sent to an elector is returned as “undeliverable” and an address correction is provided, the clerk proceeds as appropriate under “Address Change Within Jurisdiction: Written notice not provided by voter” or under “Move to a Different Jurisdiction: Written notice of voter’s registration in new jurisdiction of residence not provided.” If an address correction is *not* provided, the clerk changes the voter’s QVF status “Verify – Confirm Address.” The returned identification card is retained until the issue is resolved.

## Voter Registration Cancellations

A clerk is free to cancel a voter’s registration record should any of the following occur. Notice of the cancellation is not required.

- **The voter directs the cancellation of his or her registration record in a written, signed communication.** Sources: “Cancellation Authorization” forms executed by voters or a letter or post card signed by the voter which requests the cancellation of his or her voter registration.
- **The clerk receives or obtains information that the voter has died.** Sources: QVF inbox notification; county health department; death notices published in newspaper; personal knowledge.
- **The clerk receives notice that the voter has registered to vote in another jurisdiction through another election official or through a QVF inbox notification.**
- **The clerk determines that the voter has registered to vote in another jurisdiction through the QVF’s “Statewide Look-Up” feature.**
- **The voter verifies his or her residency in a different jurisdiction for voting purposes on a confirmation notice sent to the voter on “reliable information” that the voter has moved to a different jurisdiction.**

- **No response is received from the voter *over the course of two, successive statewide November general elections* to a confirmation notice sent to the voter on “reliable information” that the voter has moved to a different jurisdiction.**
- **The voter fails to appear to vote *over the course of two, successive statewide November general elections* after a confirmation sent to the voter on “reliable information” that the voter has moved within the jurisdiction or to a different jurisdiction is returned by the post office as “undeliverable.”**
- **The voter’s registration is challenged and it is revealed through questions directed to the voter in the polls on Election Day that he or she is *not* qualified to vote in the jurisdiction.**

### **Public Availability of Voter Registration Data**

All voter registration records are public documents and as such, must be available for public inspection during normal business hours. It is emphasized that the public availability of the records is *required by law*. Despite the public availability of voter registration information, Michigan election law restricts county, city, township and village clerks from producing lists or releasing copies of voter registration records which show any of the following information as such information is exempt from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

- Driver license or state personal identification card numbers.
- Month and day of the voters’ birthdates. (An interested person has a right to obtain a voter registration list which shows the *year* of each voter’s birth date.)
- Voter phone numbers.
- The identity or type of office that initially received the voters’ registration applications.
- Any information regarding an individual’s refusal to register to vote.

The above disclosure restrictions apply to voter registration lists produced on paper, computer tape and computer disk. A county, city, township or village clerk supplying an interested person with a copy of a voter registration record must block out the restricted information.

It bears note that the above prohibitions do *not* limit a person’s right to personally inspect a city, township or village clerk’s registration files.

### **Maintenance of Village Voter Registration Records**

With the move to a consolidated election date calendar, a number of villages have opted to conduct their regular elections in September of the odd numbered year. Such villages are

responsible for maintaining a hard copy “Active” file and “Cancellation” file. These files must mirror the records maintained by the township(s) in which each of the village electors reside. For this reason the clerk of a township, in which a village that conducts a September election is located, must establish on-going lines of communication with the village clerk so as to ensure that all information regarding new voters, voter registration updates and cancellations are coordinated between the two jurisdictions. (See: Chapter I “Structure of Michigan’s Election System” for additional information.)

## **Retention of Canceled Voter Registration Records**

City, township and village clerks are required to maintain the original copy of a canceled voter registration record for at least *ten years*. Such records must be available for public inspection upon request. Duplicate copies of canceled voter registration records may be destroyed *two years* after the date of cancellation. As an exception, an original copy of a canceled voter registration record may be destroyed after two years if the record is reproduced pursuant to the Records Media Act (MCL 24.401 - 403). A canceled voter registration record reproduced under the Records Media Act may be destroyed ten years after the date of cancellation.

## **Federal Recordkeeping and Reporting Requirements**

Rules promulgated by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to administer the NVRA require the Secretary of State to provide the FEC with a detailed report on Michigan’s implementation of the NVRA every two years. Given the data required in the report, Michigan’s city and township clerks must maintain the data identified below *on an ongoing basis*. It bears emphasis that the ongoing compilation of the data is *absolutely essential* as the nature of the required information is such that its reconstruction “after the fact” would be impossible.

The period covered by the biennial report begins the day after the last November general election and ends on the date of the following November general election. The data which must be maintained by city and township clerks in preparation for the completion of the report is detailed below:

- 1) The total number of confirmation notices mailed during the reporting period.**
- 2) The total number of confirmation notice replies received during the reporting period.**

