The Cook County Clerk's Office

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR VOTERS IN THE MARCH 17 ILLINOIS PRIMARY ELECTION

USPS POSTMARK CHANGE AND VOTE BY MAIL BALLOTS

Use Your Super Power & Vote!





WHAT'S CHANGED

Effective January 1, the U.S. Postal Service changed how postmarks are defined. Postmarks now reflect the date mail is processed – not the date it is dropped off. Processing can occur days after a ballot is placed in the mail.

In Illinois, vote by mail ballots must be postmarked by Election Day and received within 14 days. Because of this change, ballots mailed on or even several days before Election Day could still receive a late postmark and be rejected, through no fault of the voter.

WHAT VOTERS SHOULD DO

- Do not wait until the final days – or Election Day – to mail your ballot.
- If mailing, bring your ballot to a post office as early as possible and request a postmark.
- Beginning March 2, voters may use one of the Cook County Clerk's 55 secure mail ballot drop boxes available throughout suburban Cook County.

WHY THIS MATTERS

While this change has been described as minor, its potential impact on elections is anything but. Under the new rule, voters who mail their ballot on time could still see it postmarked late and not counted.

A TRUSTED VOTING OPTION

Vote by mail remains a secure, reliable, and trusted method of voting. These recommendations are intended to protect voters from postal processing delays and ensure every eligible ballot is counted.

Vote by Mail
March 17, 2026 Primary Election

IMPORTANT Postmark Changes

Returning Your Mail Ballot?
USPS Postmark Rules have Changed!



What you need to know.

PREVIOUSLY:
Mail was postmarked the day you dropped it in the mailbox.

NOT ANY MORE!
Mail is now postmarked the day it is processed at the post office, sometimes days later.

MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT!
DON'T RISK A LATE POSTMARK!

Easy Options To Cast Your Mail Ballot

- **Go to the post office counter** and request a hand-stamped postmark - cookcountyclerk.com/USPS-Locations
- **Starting March 2:**
  You may drop off your mail ballot at any of the 55 secure drop box locations throughout suburban Cook County - cookcountyclerk.com/MBdropbox