



The National Voter Registration Act and Voter Registration at Public Assistance Agencies

What is the National Voter Registration Act?

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) was passed by Congress in 1993 to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to vote. To make voter registration easier and more accessible, the NVRA includes provisions for mail-in voter registration forms, and requires states to offer voter registration services at public agencies. Although state motor vehicle departments are the most well known of these agencies, other public assistance offices are also required to proactively register voters.

What public agencies are covered by the NVRA?

Section 7 of the NVRA requires states to designate a number of agencies as voter registration sites, including:

- Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program — SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Medicaid
- State Children's Health Insurance (SCHIP)
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- State-funded programs for people with disabilities

States may designate other public agencies or offices as voter registration sites, such as libraries, schools, licensing bureaus, and unemployment compensation offices. Contact your Secretary of State's office to learn more about NVRA designated organizations in your state.

What state disability organizations are covered by the NVRA?

Each state designates which disability agencies are required to serve as NVRA voter registration sites. These typically include offices providing vocational rehabilitation, transportation, job training, education

counseling, rehabilitation, or independent-living services for persons with disabilities.

What voter registration services must be offered?

Designated agencies and offices must: (1) provide voter registration forms to clients and constituents and ask each person about registering to vote; (2) offer to assist registrants with completing the form, and; (3) accept and promptly return completed forms to the proper elections officials.

Do all states implement the NVRA? Is it effective?

No, unfortunately many states do not fully comply with their obligation to promote voter registration at public assistance agencies. However, in recent years the number of states that do has grown, in large part due to the efforts of public interest organizations. In states that have become fully compliant, the number of voter registration applications has increased dramatically.¹

Are any states exempt from the NVRA?

Yes, states that offer Election Day Registration are exempt.

How can I learn more?

Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, NVRA FAQ: http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/nvra/nvra_faq.php

Project Vote: "Voter Registration Services at Public Assistance Agencies" – A Policy Paper, April 2010 www.projectvote.org

¹ In Ohio in the first six months of 2010 more than 100,000 residents registered to vote at public assistance offices. That number (17,000 applications per month) is almost a ten-fold increase in the number of registration applications public assistance offices collected prior to the compliance lawsuit (1,775 per month). Lawsuits are not always necessary to force compliance, however. In Colorado, officials worked proactively to bring the state into compliance and as a result, public agency registrations increased from just over 3,300 in 2007 to nearly 44,000 in 2010.

Contact your Secretary of State's office to learn more about NVRA designated organizations in your state.