

Fact Sheet: Voting by mail is not new!

Florida's vote-by-mail process is not new. In fact, it began in Florida in 2002 as no-excuse absentee voting. Since then, vote-by-mail (absentee) has been available for all registered voters in the state. The following information is provided to explain how vote-by-mail works in Sarasota County.

Requesting a vote-by-mail ballot

Any registered voter may request a vote-by-mail ballot.

By law, we can only mail ballots to the voter's address on file unless the voter requests in writing the ballot be mailed to another address. Vote-by-mail ballots are not forwardable and, if returned to the elections office as undeliverable, all requests in the voter's record for future ballots will be cancelled.

Returning the ballot is easy

The voter marks the ballot, puts it in a secrecy sleeve and then into a separate mailing envelope, signs the oath on the mailing envelope, and returns it by mail or in person to any Sarasota County elections office.

Ballots may also be dropped into secure drop boxes located at elections offices and early voting sites. These drop-off sites help maintain a secure chain of custody as the ballot goes from the voter to the elections office. To be counted, ballots must be received in the elections office by 7 p.m. on election night.

You can track your ballot

You can track your vote-by-mail ballot on our website from the time your request is processed until your voted ballot is received back in the elections office and tabulated. A voter's record is updated when the ballot is received in the elections office to prevent a voter from voting twice in an election.

Verifying and processing voted ballots

Upon receipt, voters' signatures on the certificate (return) envelopes are compared to signatures on file. Signatures that cannot be verified by elections staff are reviewed by the Sarasota County Canvassing Board (a county judge, county commissioner and supervisor of elections).

If there is no signature on the return envelope or the signature does not match the signature on file, the elections office immediately notifies the voter, pursuant to Florida law, so the ballot can potentially be "cured," in time to be counted – by 5 p.m. on the second day after the election.

Canvassing and tabulating vote-by-mail ballots

The canvassing board inspects all questionable ballots (no signatures, mismatched signatures, etc.) and only the canvassing board may reject a ballot. All board proceedings are conducted in a public meeting.

Accepted (legal) vote-by-mail ballots are tabulated through high-speed optical scan readers, in a secure area of the supervisor of elections office in the presence of the canvassing board.

Tabulated results are not released until after the polls close on election night. Vote-by-mail ballots are the first to be counted and those results, along with early voting, are the first to be published after the polls close on election night.

Results are audited

After the election, a manual audit is conducted, pursuant to Florida law, to confirm the voting system tabulated all votes accurately.

