

Better: Voting by Mail and Dropping off the Ballot

Provided that a voter already has on file, or makes a request for a mail ballot long before the election including the address where the voter needs to receive the ballot, voting by mail is a good option. The vote can be cast from the safety of the voter's home without in-person contact. The voter does not have to have or show anyone an ID. **THE ENVELOPE MUST BE SEALED AND SIGNED AND DATED** no matter how the voter chooses to turn or mail in the ballot. If the voter's signature has changed over time or recently, including its appearance, it is a good idea to file a voter registration form updating the signature before sending back the mail ballot to avoid issues later. If a voter turns the ballot into a Supervisor of Elections office and asks the Elections employee to verify the signature before using a drop box, the signature will be examined and if necessary a voter registration form updating a signature that has changed in any way, including appearance, at the same time.

If using a mail ballot, it is highly recommended that it be returned in person, not by mail. **Any ballot may be walked into a Supervisor of Elections office (including by a voter's family member) and put into a drop box during business hours starting on September 18 (and may have the signature verified before dropping it the box).** A ballot received, for example, by the end of September, may be promptly completed, put into the required envelope and signed and dated, and walked into an SoE office immediately.

Alternatively, this year the county expects to have more than 20 drop off locations (see separate document with list of locations) open during Early Voting, with days and hours varying by location. These will be listed online (the ones posted as I draft this were for the primary and may or may not be the same ones and number of locations used for the General Election), The list is also sent to each voter who requests a mail ballot. Each location has a drop box and two SoE employees assigned to oversee the safe and secure receipt of ballots. **The main SoE office, on Starkey, provides the option of drive-through drop-off** of ballots. This will be open during Early Voting, 7 am-7 pm, and the drive-through may begin operations at an earlier date which will be on the website once a decision is made. It is located at the entrance to the office and allows the voter to remain in his/her car, handing the ballot to a worker who puts it directly into a lock box and provides an I Voted sticker.

Drop offs at a Supervisor of Elections office are allowed as soon as ballots are completed up to and including election day.

Drop offs on election day must be at one of the Supervisor of Elections office, not at another drop off location listed below or at a polling place. Drop-offs at the drop-off locations are during Early Voting only and the days and times vary by location (as posted and sent to each mail voter). For the primary, both the Seminole and Largo libraries were convenient drop-off sites.

All ballots in Florida are identical in format (paper) and content (depending on locality) whether used in person or sent to the voter. However, there is one important

distinction: only one **mail** ballot may be cast and the voter does not run the ballot through the voting machine (it gets loaded into a machine after Early Voting begins, by an SoE employee, and the results are unknown and unreported until Election Day). If a voter realizes that there is a mistake before returning the ballot, a replacement ballot can be given to the voter (in person, or by mail if it is early enough). But if there is a mistake the voter doesn't realize (including forgetting to vote in a race the voter cares about or voting for two candidates in a race where only one can win, known as undervotes and overvotes respectively), in most cases the voter won't know about the mistake and will have no impact on those races (other portions of the ballot, completed correctly, will count).

When voting in person, during Early Voting or on Election Day, the voter runs the ballot through the machine. The machine reports if there is an undervote or overvote or if some or all of the ballot cannot be read, and the voter gets up to two more tries to submit the votes he or she intended. Also, election personnel are available to offer assistance. So for a voter who may have trouble, for any reason, completing a ballot correctly, in-person voting is preferable to any form of mail voting.