

LEGAL EASE



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Can you still vote if you live in a long term care facility?

The ability to vote is a precious right and privilege for all Americans. A recent news story reported that a group of new Americans, immediately after becoming citizens, registered to vote. They understood the need to exercise this important aspect of being a U.S. citizen.

But what if you or a loved one lives in a long term care facility? Have you given up your right to vote? Elder Law Answers, in a recent newsletter, spoke to this subject in "How to Vote While in a Nursing Home." Much of the advice given does not just apply to persons in a skilled care unit but even those in personal care or those who have moved recently to independent living.

The first step is to register since you likely have had a change of address which would affect where you would vote. You can register in person, by mail, or online. Since many persons in long term care facilities have mobility issues, registering online or by mail may be the best option. The Social Worker in your facility may be helpful or perhaps a family member can help if you do not have access to a computer. The State website is www.register.votespa.com; there you can register online or you can download the form and mail it in. The deadline to register for the November 8 election is October 11 so do not delay. No photo ID is required.

Each County has a Board of Elections where there is information for those who are elderly or have disabilities since Pennsylvania recognizes that there are many voters who may have challenges that affect their ability to vote. As an example, the telephone number of the Montgomery County Board of Elections division related to registration is 610-278-3280. There are people standing by to assist you. If enough residents in your facility are similarly situated, there may be a way to assist a group of you.

Once you have registered, you must cast a ballot in order to vote. For many that is simply a matter of getting to the designated polling place. It could be that your facility will provide assistance in getting you and others in the facility there. However, if the polling place is not accessible to you, either because of your lack of ability to leave the facility or because the polling place is inaccessible for other reasons, you are entitled to assistance with casting your ballot, or to an alternative ballot. You can also cast an absentee ballot. Note that the deadline to request accommodations is November 1, 2016. In Montgomery County, the telephone number to call to obtain assistance with an alternative ballot or an absentee ballot is 610-278-3275.

The upcoming Presidential election is generating a great deal of interest. Many people have strong opinions about each candidate and express them frequently. However, the only opinion that matters is your vote. Consider continuing to vote; nursing home residence does not need to be a barrier.