

Many people take the right to vote for granted. In most elections, fewer than half of the registered voters even show up. This would likely horrify our Founding Fathers who went to war with the greatest military power in the world in part because they could not vote for the people who made the decisions that affected their lives.

As American citizens, we have a right to vote in a free and fair election. In order for that to happen, we also have certain responsibilities that go along with that right. The Code of Massachusetts Regulations contains specific rules that govern our elections so as to ensure fair and open elections. These regulations can be found at [www.sec.state.ma.us](http://www.sec.state.ma.us). Here are some details about voting and elections that you may need to know.

In order to exercise your right to vote it is your responsibility to ensure that you are registered to vote. If you have moved or changed your name, you need to notify the Clerk of your city or town to ensure your name and address are accurate on the voting list.

If you are out of town on Election Day or otherwise cannot get to the polls (i.e., you are having surgery that day or are away at college), you have the right to an absentee vote. To obtain an absentee ballot, you must submit a signed request in writing to your City or Town clerk that instructs them where to send it. This must be done before noon the day preceding the Election, as the ballot must, by law, be mailed to you. You must have the ballot back to the City Clerk no later than 8:00 pm on Election Day.

We all enjoy the right to freedom of speech and can therefore show our support or opposition to any candidate or ballot question. However, we also have a responsibility to respect others' rights to a free election. So all signs, political buttons, brochures and other materials that are designed to influence a voter cannot be displayed within 150 feet of the polling place. A voter may, however, bring materials with them for their own use but may not display them to others.

Legally, all elections must take place in full public view. Therefore, all citizens have the right to observe the election and the ballot counting. Again, anyone wishing to observe the election or the vote counting, must respect the decorum of the polling place, may not interfere with the

voting or counting process, must sit or stand in an area designated by the poll warden, may not communicate with voters in any way and must direct all questions to the poll warden.

Finally, if you have any problems on Election Day that cannot be resolved by the poll warden, you may contact the City or Town Clerk. If the Clerk is unable to resolve the problem, you may contact the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Elections Division at 617-727-2828 or 1-800-462-8683.

Voting is our right and our duty. Elections are our chance to choose our leaders who make decisions that affect everything from fixing the potholes on our streets, providing police and fire protection and the quality of the school our child attends, to leading us in to or out of war. While these rules are not all that inspiring, they are essential in ensuring that our right to vote is protected and our voices are heard.

Thank you.