



Know Your Rights: Voting in Massachusetts

(Updated 10.16.2024)

Trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people in Massachusetts have the right to vote freely in local, municipal, state, or federal elections.

Despite that right, however, people occasionally encounter discrimination when they arrive at the polls—they may be questioned because their identification doesn't match their gender presentation, or they're in the process of having their name legally changed. And some may face other difficulties, such as trying to vote while being unstably housed or incarcerated.

With the tips we've provided in this guide, you'll be able to respond to some of the most common challenges that trans voters face.

Remember, your voice matters!

1) Am I eligible to vote in Massachusetts?

- Any US citizen over the age of 18 is eligible to vote in Massachusetts, as long as they are not currently incarcerated with a felony conviction (<https://hls.harvard.edu/today/your-massachusetts-voting-rights-guide/>)
- All other incarcerated people are still allowed to vote by absentee ballot (<https://866ourvote.org/state/massachusetts/>)
- Students are eligible to vote in MA if they live there to attend college (<https://transequality.org/resources/voting-while-trans-preparing-voter-id-laws>)

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2) Do I need an ID to vote in Massachusetts?

In general, no. Unlike many other states, Massachusetts **does not require voters to present a photo ID** to vote in state or federal elections.

There are two major exceptions:

- 1) If you are a first-time voter in a federal election, you will need to present identification.
- 2) If you do not fill out the annual municipal street census form, you may have your status changed to “inactive voter.” Inactive voters are required to present an ID or proof of address, including utility bills and leases.

- https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/local/2024-massachusetts-annual-municipal-census-guide-and-how-to-what-is-town-census/article_b0282f46-b700-11ee-b4fa-9f840abae584.html
- <https://hls.harvard.edu/today/your-massachusetts-voting-rights-guide/>

If you need help changing the name or gender marker on your Massachusetts or federal ID, learn more at www.masstpc.org/IDA.

3) How do I know if I’m registered to vote, and how can I update my voter registration?

Visit [the website of the Secretary of the Commonwealth](#) to check your registration status and information. You’ll enter your full name, date of birth, and five-digit zip code. You can also [learn your polling place](#) here.

4) Can I vote if I don’t have stable housing?

Yes, you can! If you do not have a permanent residence or address, you can use a shelter address as a primary address to establish residency.

(<https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2024/10/13/pine-street-inn-spreading-message-that-homeless-people-are-allowed-to-vote/>)

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5) How do I vote if I'm in the process of filing a legal name change?

REMINDER: *If you are a first-time voter using your old name, you will need to provide a photo ID to the poll worker to be able to vote.*

If you're already an existing registered voter in the same precinct, you will be able to vote using your old name. If a poll worker challenges you, you can affirm that you are the "identical person you represent yourself to be, or that you are registered in this precinct [or town] and that you have not voted at this election." The city or town is required to take your vote.

If you are still unable to cast a vote, you may request a provisional ballot which will be reviewed by your local election office at a later date to confirm your eligibility to vote. (<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/elections/voting-information/provisional-ballots.htm>)

6) What can I do if I'm being discriminated against at my polling place?

- Massachusetts has strong laws protecting trans people's rights, including their right to vote. Unfortunately, you may still be discriminated against at the polls. For example, some may discriminate against you because your gender presentation doesn't match the name or gender marker on your ID. Some may ask you intrusive questions about your transition or appearance. **This is illegal.** (<https://transequality.org/resources/voting-while-trans-preparing-voter-id-laws>)
- If a poll worker is preventing you from voting, call the Nationwide Election Protection Hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683).

7) What else can I do to protect myself on Election Day?

In some cases, voting by mail or by absentee ballot may give you the space to avoid discrimination by poll workers. Anyone can vote by mail as long as they fill out the [vote-by-mail application](#). The requirements for an absentee ballot are a bit stricter. Voters qualify if they have a disability that prevents them from voting in person, if they have religious beliefs that prevent them from voting on election day, or they will be out of town on election day. (<https://866ourvote.org/state/massachusetts/>)

You may also want to vote early for similar reasons. Although you'll still be interacting with poll workers in person, you'll probably have fewer people around you, which can reduce stress.

8) What other resources are there for trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming voters?

- The Trans Lifeline and Lambda Legal [created an infographic](#) for trans people whose names or gender markers don't match their appearance.
- [Election Protection](#) has a comprehensive guide for Massachusetts voters, including absentee voters, overseas voters, incarcerated people, and members of the military.
- Transform the Vote has [a set of guides and voting-day checklists](#) (English and Spanish) for trans voters.
- The [Williams Institute](#) conducted a wide-ranging study about US voter-ID laws and their impact on transgender voters.
- All In to Vote, an organization that promotes voting among college students, [hosts a guide for trans voters](#).