



Your Right to Vote in New York State: Individuals with Mental Health Disabilities

Do I have the right to vote if I have a mental health problem?

YES! According to New York State election law, if you are otherwise eligible to vote, **you are only prevented from voting if you have been adjudged incompetent or incapacitated to vote by order of a court.** To be otherwise eligible to vote, you must:

- be a United States citizen
- be 18 years old by December 31 of the year in which you register (note: you must be 18 years old by the date of the general, primary or other election in which you want to vote)
- live at your present address at least 30 days before an election
- not be in jail or on parole for a felony conviction
- not claim the right to vote elsewhere
- have registered to vote.

No person is prohibited from voting simply because he or she has been subjected to civil commitment.

If you are not sure of your legal right to vote, the board of elections will check your status after you file your registration form and inform you of any considerations.

Will my benefits and services be affected by my registering to vote?

No, there is no relationship between registering to vote and your eligibility for benefits and services.

Why should I vote?

Each year, 44 million Americans will experience a diagnosable mental health problem. If even a fraction of these individuals were mobilized, they could form a powerful voting bloc. An educated, voting mental health constituency could help inform policy decisions in areas such as mental health funding, involuntary outpatient commitment laws, seclusion and restraint standards, privacy rights, employment rights, and much more. Without the backing of voters, many mental health advocacy efforts will not be successful.

How do I register to vote?

You need to fill out and submit a Voter Registration form. You may register in person at your local board of elections or at any state agency participating in the National Voter Registration Act, on any business day throughout the year. You may also register by mail. Forms are available from your county board of elections, town and city halls, post offices, political parties, various state offices, and the League of Women Voters. Contact the League of Women Voters of New York State - 1-866-LWVNYS1, the New York State Board of Elections - 1-800-FOR-VOTE, or your county board of elections to have a voter registration form sent to you. You may also download a voter registration form in New York State from <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/>. Complete, sign, and submit the form, either in person or by mail.

If I register to vote, will I be called for jury duty?

The rolls of prospective jurors are compiled from a number of sources, so registering to vote does not necessarily mean that you will be called. Similarly, *not* registering to vote does not necessarily mean that you will *not* be called for jury duty. If you are called and feel that you cannot serve, jurors can often be temporarily or permanently excused for a valid health reason.

To obtain a Voter Registration form or Absentee Ballot Application form, or to find out dates for the elections, for registering, for filing absentee ballot applications and submitting ballots:

- Call the NYS Board of Elections at 1-800-367-8683, or download the forms/calendar from the web site for the New York State Board of Elections (<http://www.elections.state.ny.us/>).
- Call, write to, or download forms/calendar from the web site for your local county board of elections. You can get their contact information from the NYS Board of Elections.
- Call your local League of Women Voters, or the League of Women Voters of New York State at 518-465-4162 or toll free at 1-866-598-6971, or go to our web site at <http://www.lwvny.org/>.

League of Women Voters of New York State, 62 Grand Street, Albany, New York 12207

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**The League of Women Voters of New York State is a unique, multi-issue, nonpartisan, political organization. It encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. **

To check your voter registration status:

You should receive in the mail before the election a card that informs you of your polling place. If you do not receive such a card, call your local board of elections and ask them:

1. Am I registered to vote?
2. Is my registration status set to "Active"? If not, to what is it set?
3. Will my name appear in the polling place roll book on Election Day?

If you are not on the rolls at your polling place:

If you believe you are registered to vote and are not on the rolls, ask for an "affidavit" (paper) ballot, and ask the poll worker for advisement about following up on your status. You are legally entitled to an affidavit (paper) ballot and must be given one.



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