

Voter Guide

This voter guide will provide you with information you need to better understand the election process and your role in it. It is a guide to voting in Minnesota, the layers of United States government, how to find information about candidates and ballot questions, and why it is important to be involved in democracy.

If you have questions about this guide or about any step of the elections process, please contact [Hennepin County elections office](#) or the [Secretary of State's Office](#).

Note: If you are a participant in the [Safe at Home](#) program, please visit the Safe at Home program website to learn more about how to vote or call the Safe at Home number, 1-866-723-3035.

Voter Registration

Before you vote, you must register to vote. Registration proves you are permitted to vote. In Minnesota we have pre-registration and Election Day Registration which allows Minnesotans to choose when they register to vote. Voter registration laws vary by state.

Am I able to vote?

You are eligible (allowed) to vote in Minnesota if you are:

- A U.S. Citizen
- At least 18 years of age on Election Day
- A resident of Minnesota for 20 days
- Finished with all parts of any felony sentence
- Not restricted from voting by a court

Note: You can vote while under guardianship unless a judge has revoked your right to vote. Only a court can take away your right to vote.

How do I know if I need to register to vote?

If you have not registered to vote in Minnesota before OR

If you have registered in Minnesota before, but you:

- moved (even to a different apartment in the same building)
- changed your name
- have not voted in more than four years
- were convicted of a felony, but now are eligible to vote because you served all parts of your sentence

If you don't know if you are registered to vote, you can [check online](#).

If you cannot confirm your voter registration, you can [re-register to vote](#) or contact Hennepin County Elections.

[How do I register to vote?](#)

- Online* at [mnvotes.org](#)
- By mail* by printing and mailing [this form](#).
- In-person* at [Hennepin County elections office](#).

**Pre-registration is registering any time up to 21 days before an election. This allows enough time to prepare voting lists for each polling place. Registrations that arrive after the 21-day cut-off will cause the county to send out a notice of late registration. You can show that notice at your polling place to register on the day of the election..*

- When voting early with an absentee ballot, in-person or by mail, you may register to vote. You can [apply for an absentee ballot mailed to you](#). Or request one in-person at your [county elections office](#) as early as 46 days before the election.

- On Election Day, [at your polling place](#).

When registering to vote on Election Day, you will need to provide proof of a) who you are, and b) where you live.

A valid Minnesota driver's license or state ID card can do both. If you do not have either of those, [there are alternatives](#).

- When updating your driver's license or changing your address, [through the post office](#).

Voting

What are my options to vote?

There are three ways you can vote in Minnesota: Using an absentee ballot by mail; using an absentee ballot in-person; at your polling place on Election Day. For each of these, you have the option of registering at the same time.

Vote early by mail

- **Apply online** to have an absentee ballot mailed to you.
- Fill out a paper application and deliver it to your **county elections** office by mail, fax, or email. Submit your application within enough time to receive and return your ballot before Election Day
- Your ballot will be mailed to you. Follow all instructions. You will need a registered Minnesota Voter or a Notary Public to sign your ballot paperwork, showing that it's you who filled it out. Return the ballot by mail or **in-person** before 3 p.m. on Election Day. Ballots received after Election Day may not be counted. *Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these rules were temporarily changed for the 2020 election.*

Vote early in-person

- At local election office or designated early voting locations.
- With an absentee ballot starting 46 days before Election Day.
- Get your ballot, fill it out, and place it into the vote tabulator (counting machine) in the last seven days before Election Day.

Vote on Election Day

- Look up your **polling place location** and make a plan to get to it on foot, drive or get a ride from a carpool or use public transportation.
- Determine a good time to vote.
- Most polling places are **open 7 a.m.-8 p.m.; some may open later**.
- If you are in line by 8 p.m., you will be allowed to vote
- You have a right to **take the time off you need from work to vote**, without losing your pay, personal leave, or vacation time. It is best to make a plan with your supervisor well ahead of time.

Voting on Election Day

1: Signing in

There will be a table with a roster judge with the voting list. There may be a line to get to the table.

- Tell the roster judge your name.
- If you are already registered to vote, your name will be on the roster. You just need to sign next to your name. If you are already registered, you do not need to show ID when you sign in. If you haven't registered yet, you'll register at a different table.
- The roster judge will give you a receipt which you will bring to the ballot judge (election judge with the ballots).

2: Pick up your ballot

You will give your receipt to the ballot judge and then they will hand you your ballot.

3: Filling out your ballot

You may vote in a private area at one of the voting booths. Your vote is secret. Vote with a pen and completely fill in the oval next to each of your choices.

OR

You can fill out your ballot using a ballot-marking machine. The ballot-marking machine has many accessibility options for marking your ballot, such as large print, spoken instructions, Braille keypad or touchscreen. The machine will print out your marked ballot.

The ballot instructions will say how many candidates you can choose for each office. Usually the instructions will say to "choose one candidate." Some local offices may have more than one seat to fill; for these you may choose more than one candidate.

- Your ballot will count even if you do not vote on every race or ballot question.
- If you make a mistake, you have a right to ask for a replacement ballot.
- If you need help, you have the right to have someone help you in the voting booth.

4: Take your ballot to the tabulator

(ballot box and counting machine)

After you have voted, put your ballot in the ballot-counting machine.

If you need help, ask the election judge standing near the ballot-counting machine.

Be sure to get your "I Voted" sticker before you leave!

Note: There are **other rights you have around voting**

Layers of Government

Every layer of government is formed by voters. Democracy relies on participation. The system in place is not enough, you must participate; your voice needs to be part of sustaining democracy.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

As established by the founding fathers of the Constitution, there are three branches of the federal government: executive, legislative, and judicial. They each have separate powers in order to form a system of checks and balances; so, one branch does not end up too powerful. Their decisions affect all U.S. residents.

Executive Branch

The executive branch is composed of the president, vice president, and the federal departments of the executive branch. Each department has a leader, and those leaders serve on a group called the president's cabinet. While the president and vice president are elected, the cabinet is not. Cabinet members (e.g., the secretary of state, secretary of agriculture, and attorney general) are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate by a majority vote. Cabinet members each have thousands of people working for them, doing the work of their department.

President: Head of state; Commander-in-Chief of the military; has the power to approve or veto (reject) any bills Congress passes.

Vice President: Head of the Senate; supports the president in their duties.

Cabinet: Advises the president based on their expertise and responsible for the work of their department.

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch consists of the elected offices of U.S. senator and U.S. representative. Each state has two senators. The number of representatives for each state depends on the number of people counted as living there by the U.S. Census, which takes place every 10 years. Minnesota currently has eight representatives, one serving the people in **their eight congressional districts**.

Senators and representatives create and enact laws. After bills are passed by a vote in each part of Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives), the president will either sign the bill into law or veto (reject) the bill. A veto sends the bill back to Congress for further consideration. It may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of each chamber.

Note: If Congress is in session and the president does not take any action, the bill automatically becomes a law after 10 days.

The difference between the House and Senate:

Senate: Approves appointments made by the president, signs treaties, and tries impeachment cases.

House of Representatives: All bills that raise money are required to start here. They also have the power to impeach (formally charge) someone who holds public office.

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch is made up of the Supreme Court and other federal courts. Federal and Supreme Court judges are appointed by the president and serve lifelong terms. They interpret laws according

to the U.S. Constitution. They consider the impact on society as well as legal precedent (previous case history) when making their decisions. One exception in term length are bankruptcy judges, appointed by the court of appeals to serve 14-year terms.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Like the federal government, Minnesota's government is divided into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial.

Executive Branch

The executive branch of state government contains the offices of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state auditor and attorney general. Individuals holding these offices are elected by all voters who live in Minnesota.

Governor: Appoints heads of departments and agencies. They propose state budgets and signs (approves) or vetoes (rejects) legislation. Also appoints judges to fill vacancies and issues pardons, reprieves; can restore rights to felons.

Lieutenant Governor: Assumes the governor's responsibilities in the governor's absence or if there is a vacancy. Also performs projects and other duties assigned by the governor.

Secretary of State: Acts as chief election official, oversees enactment of election laws and training of county elections staff. They also certify official state documents, registers businesses and nonprofit organizations. Manages the Safe at Home program.

State Auditor: Oversees dollars spent by local governments and performs audits of local government financial statements.

Attorney General: Provides legal services to state government, represents the state in court cases, enforces laws concerning charitable organizations and protects public rights.

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch contains the elected offices of state senator and state representative. Minnesota has 67 state senators elected from 67 Senate districts. Each Senate district contains two house districts A and B for a total of 134 representatives in the Minnesota house. Voters who live in the designated districts may vote for the office that represents them. Like the U.S. Congress, state senators and state representatives create and enact laws. After laws are passed by vote through both the state Senate and the state House, the governor will either sign the bill into law or veto the bill. A veto sends the bill back to the legislature.

State Senator: Makes, debates, and votes on legislation in order to pass new laws or modify those that already exist.

State Representative: Creates and passes bills (e.g., public policy). Also establishes a state budget that includes the lowering or raising of taxes.

Judicial Branch

The judicial branch of the Minnesota state government interprets laws according to state law and the Minnesota state constitution. Justices in the supreme court, judges in appeals court and judges in the district court consider the impact on society as well as legal precedent when making their decisions. Justices and judges are appointed by the governor when there is a vacancy in the court, then may run for election for the seat when the term concludes. After the election, the individual serves a six-year term until the next election, when they can run again.

Minnesota Supreme Court: This is an appellate which hears appeal cases from the Minnesota Court of Appeals or other lower courts and cases that deal with the nuances of the constitution and public policy. No new evidence or the use of juries are used in these cases. The judges make the final decision.

Court of Appeals: This is an intermediary appellate court that hears the majority of appeal cases. They do not have jurisdiction over statewide elections, first-degree murder cases, and appeals from Minnesota Tax Court and Workers Compensation Court. These cases go straight to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

District Courts: This is where most legal cases begin from family conflicts, traffic violations, and first-degree murder trials. There is a total of [10 district courts in the state](#)

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Counties are smaller governmental sections of the state, with their own layer of government, and offices.

County Commissioner: Approves the annual county budget and determines the county's tax levy. Hires the county administrator and authorizes personnel rules. They also work on long-range planning and capital improvements. Authorizes the use of state and federal grants. Adopts county laws and fills mid-term vacancies of county attorney and sheriff.

County Sheriff: Peacekeeper and law enforcer for the county. Executes all processes, writs, precepts, and orders issued or made by lawful authority. Attends upon the terms of the district court. They investigate recreational vehicle crashes involving personal injury or death that occur outside the boundaries of a municipality. Serves all papers and posts all notices named by law to be served or posted on behalf of the state or of the county. Maintains the charge and custody of the county jail.

County Attorney: Provides legal services to the county. Prosecutes felony crimes and all cases involving juvenile offenders. Oversees juvenile diversion programs. Aids and gives support to the victims and witnesses who play a vital role in the criminal justice system. Advises crime victims of their legal rights and status of their case, requesting restitution for losses suffered. Starts legal proceedings to protect the health and safety of vulnerable adults within the county when they need assistance. Brings actions to obtain or enforce child support obligations.

CITY GOVERNMENT

Within each county are cities and towns, each with its own ordinances (laws).

Mayor: Chief executive of a city. Makes appointments subject to the approval of the council. Presides at council meetings. Proposes city budgets. Creates citizen commissions to serve the community.

City Council: Legislates for the city, passes ordinances and sets administrative policy. Passes city budgets. Appoints people to committees and commissions.

SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

School Board Member: Creates school policies, employs a superintendent to provide educational leadership for the district. Funds the school with a property levy and support from the state of Minnesota.

Learn about candidates and ballot questions

Use mnvotes.org to look at your sample ballot and search candidate filings. Discover their contact information, including candidates' websites, emails, and phone numbers. You can contact candidates with questions you have about issues important to you.

Here are some helpful resources:

- Online, including campaign websites, candidate social media platforms, and websites that come up in searches. Evaluate websites carefully.
- Candidate speeches, debates.
- Endorsements (public support of a candidate).
- Press reports from newspapers, television and radio.
- Mailings sent to constituents.
- Ads on television and radio.
- Voting records for incumbents (those looking to be re-elected)
- League of Women Voters: lwvmn.org
- Ballotpedia: Ballotpedia.org

Federal office (representative, senator)

See how they voted in [GovTrack Voting Records](#).

State office (representative, senator, governor, etc.)

[Minnesota Legislator Voting Records and Ratings Guide](#).

County office (commissioner, sheriff, attorney)

Go to the county website and review [county board actions](#) and [meeting information](#).

City and township office (mayor, city council)

Go the city or township's website and review any information available from their meetings. Local newspapers may have articles.

School board

Go to the school system's Board of Education website and review any information available from their meetings. Local newspapers may have articles.

Judgeship

To learn about candidates for judge, use the [Minnesota State Bar Association's Judicial Candidate Info page](#).

Major party contacts:

More about major parties and minor parties [online](#).

Grassroots Legalize Cannabis Party

2114 East 35th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55407
651-280-7922
grassrootsparty.net

Legal Marijuana Now Party

1717 Tyler Street N.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55413
763-742-6198
legalcannabisnow.org

Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party

255 East Plato Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55107
651-293-1200
1-800-999-7457
dfi.org

Minnesota Republican Party

7400 Metro Blvd., Suite 424
Edina, MN 55439
651-222-0022
mngop.com