



Maryland State Board of Elections

Ballot Drop Boxes: Chain of Custody Procedures for Removal and Return of Election Materials from Correctional Facilities

Terms

1. “The facility” refers to a correctional facility under the purview of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.
2. “The local board” refers to the local board of elections in the jurisdiction of the referenced facility.
3. “The Department” refers to the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

Minimum Requirements for People Collecting Election Materials

1. The local board of elections must swear in any person it designates to empty the drop boxes.
2. Any person emptying the drop boxes at a correctional facility must have a criminal background conducted by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Individuals who are exempt from the background check required by the State Board of Elections to empty standard ballot drop boxes are NOT exempt from the background check required by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.
3. Any person emptying drop boxes at a correctional facility must present a valid State-issued photo ID for entry. The facility will issue a visitor badge which must be worn for the entirety of the visit to the facility.
4. Any person emptying drop boxes at a correctional facility is subject to all applicable rules for visitors, including dress code, security screenings for entering the facility, and leaving prohibited items in their vehicle¹, and shall be escorted to each ballot drop box by a representative of the facility.
5. All ballot drop boxes must be under 24/7 camera surveillance, and the local board must have immediate access or access within a reasonable amount of time to the security camera monitoring the ballot box.²
6. Collectors shall make in-person visits in accordance with the schedule outlined [online](#).

Recommendations

1. The person emptying the drop boxes should display their State or county employment ID while picking up the ballots. Board members may wear name badges in lieu of a State or county employment ID.
2. The person emptying the drop boxes should wear a top with the name of the election office (e.g., vest or shirt with “[County Name] Board of Elections”) printed on it.
3. Wherever possible, work in a team of two election officials to retrieve ballots.

Retrieving Ballots – Schedule- Election Time

1. “Election time” refers to the time, during a statewide election year, starting when Voter Information Packets are delivered to each correctional facility for a primary election (approximately 60 days before the voter registration deadline) to date of the general election.

¹ All restrictions and requirements of visitors are listed at the end of this document as Appendix #1.

² See Election Law Article, §2-305(a)(1) ([SB 683](#) and [HB 1048](#) of the 2021 Laws of Maryland).

2. During Election time, assigned personnel shall empty the ballot drop boxes on scheduled days (and to the extent possible, regularly scheduled times) that shall be predetermined and agreed upon with the facility.
3. When a specified election deadline occurs, assigned personnel shall empty ballot drop boxes on the day of the deadline, or if facility administrators agree to lock a ballot drop box at the end of the day on the day of the deadline, within two days after the deadline.
 - a. For the 2026 Primary Election, the election deadlines are as follows:
 - i. Deadline to Register to Vote & Update Registration Information (including Party Affiliation): Tuesday, June 2, 2026.
 - ii. Deadline to Request a Mail-In Ballot: Tuesday, June 16, 2026
 - iii. Election Day: Tuesday, June 23, 2026.
 - b. For the 2026 General Election, the election deadlines are as follows:
 - i. Deadline to Register to Vote & Update Registration Information (including Party Affiliation): Tuesday, October 13, 2026.
 - ii. Deadline to Request a Mail-In Ballot to be received via the mail: Tuesday, October 27, 2026.
 - iii. Election Day: Tuesday, November 3, 2026.
4. On the deadline to register to vote, the ballot drop boxes shall be emptied as close to 5 pm as possible, but not before 5 pm.
5. On the deadline to request a mail-in ballot, empty containers as close to 8 pm as possible, but not before 8 pm.
6. On Election Day, the ballot drop boxes shall be emptied as close to 8 pm as possible, but not before 8 pm.

Retrieving Ballots – Schedule- Non-Election Time

1. “Non-election time” refers to the time period starting the day after a general election, through 60 days prior to the voter registration deadline for the primary election of the next election cycle.
2. The State Board shall make arrangements to empty the ballot drop boxes at minimum quarterly during non-election time, on regularly scheduled days (and to the extent possible, regularly scheduled times) that shall be predetermined and agreed upon with the facility.

Emptying the Drop Boxes – Process

In advance of each Election Time period, SBE shall create and provide to assigned personnel a *Ballot Drop Box Integrity/Transportation Log* (“Integrity Report”) that is specific to each facility. People collecting materials must use a lockable canvassing bag or lockable provisional ballot bag to transport picked-up election materials from the drop box to the local board’s office.³ For each ballot drop box to be emptied:

1. Check that and confirm that⁴:
 - a. The lock on the ballot drop box is intact;
 - b. The tamper tape is intact; and

³ If a canvassing or provisional ballot bag is not available, a lockable ballot bin or other secure lockable container can be used, but the facility must pre-approve the container in advance of the visit. Pre-approval can be obtained by contacting the Warden’s office.

⁴ If the lock or tamper tape is not intact, or the tamper tape numbers do not match the numbers from the previous retrieval, follow the steps listed on Page 4 of these procedures for evidence of tampering under “Other Procedures.”

- c. The tamper tape numbers match the tamper tape numbers on the *Integrity Report* from the previous pick up.
2. Remove the tamper tape and unlock the door of the ballot drop box.
3. Put all contents of the ballot drop box into the canvassing bag.
4. Count the total number of envelopes, applications, ballots, or other miscellaneous correspondence returned in each ballot drop box and record on the *Integrity Report*.⁵
5. Close and lock the ballot drop box front panel.
6. Apply a new tamper tape to the ballot drop box.
7. Record the new tamper tape number on the *Integrity Report*.
8. If there is more than one ballot box to be emptied, close the canvassing bag using the zipper but do not lock the bag yet.
9. After all the ballot drop boxes have been emptied, lock the canvassing bag and put a new seal on the lock. Record the seal number in appropriate column on the *Integrity Report*.

If a voter hands over election materials while an assigned person is retrieving ballots, the collector should take the items and put them in the canvassing bag before sealing.

If a voter wants to deliver materials after the cutoff time for a drop off on a deadline day, the collector should inform the voter that the drop off is not timely. If the voter insists on the collector taking the materials, the collector should write the date and time and their initials on the return envelope, place it in the canvassing bag if not locked, or collect and hold the envelope with the canvassing bag if it is already locked.

Other Procedures

If a ballot box is required to be opened outside of a scheduled ballot retrieval process:

1. Check that the tamper tape number matches the seal number on the *Integrity Report*.
2. Unlock the ballot drop box lid.
3. Perform whatever task necessitated opening the ballot drop box.
4. Close and lock the ballot drop box lid.
5. Attach a new tamper tape to the drop box.
6. Record the new tamper tape number on the *Integrity Report*.

If there is evidence of tampering:

1. Report the incident to the facility (report to Shift Commander via the facility escort) and ask the warden or facility officer to take pictures of the damage or evidence of tampering.
2. Record the incident on the back of the *Integrity Report*.
3. If possible, remove all ballots and attach a new seal.
4. Upon exiting the correctional facility, call your supervisor immediately and inform them of the evidence of tampering.
5. A local board or other supervisor should report the incident to SBE.
 - a. If the damage appears to be tampering with ballots, call SBE staff instead of emailing. Start with a regional manager, then Russell Hicks, then Mary Ann

⁵ Voter Registration Applications and Requests for Mail-in Ballots will most likely be returned in the same envelope, which is different than the mail-in ballot return envelope. However, an individual may choose to return these forms in separate or non-official envelopes, or in no envelope at all. The local board representative should count the total number of 1) mail-in ballot envelopes, and 2) all other voting information packet envelopes, non-official envelopes, and loose applications received deposited and record both numbers on the *Integrity Report*.

Mogavero, then Melissia Dorsey or Katherine Berry until you reach someone. If you can't reach any of the SBE staff listed, then call the main office number. If you still can't reach anyone, send an urgent email to everyone listed.

- b. If the damage appears to be from roughhousing and did not affect the integrity of any ballots, then an email to the SBE staff listed will suffice.
6. SBE will determine if additional law enforcement should be notified.

Returning Ballots to Office

Note: The local election official performing the tasks listed below cannot be the same official that picked up and delivered the voted ballots and election mail to the office.

When the ballots or election mail (in the canvassing bag) are returned to the office, a local board official should:

1. Verify the seal number on the canvassing bag matches the seal number on the *Integrity Report*.
2. Remove all collected election envelopes from the canvassing bag.
3. Sort envelopes into three piles: 1) voter registration applications and mail-in ballot applications; 2) ballots, 3) miscellaneous other correspondence.
4. Count the number of application envelopes and the number of ballot packets.⁶
5. Record the number of each on the *Drop Box Acceptance Log for Election Mail from Correctional Facilities*.
6. Process received voter registration applications and requests for mail-in ballots using the normal process.
7. Process ballots following the mail-in ballot process, including recording in MDVOTERS that these ballots were dropped off at a ballot drop box.
8. Election mail that is returned to the local board from the drop box but needs to be forwarded to a different local board should be forwarded to the correct local board in the same manner as for any other election mail received that was sent or delivered to the incorrect drop box.

Notes on Drop Box Installation

When any new drop boxes are being installed and used for the first time, the following procedures should be followed.

For each ballot drop box to be installed, the facility shall:

1. Confirm having the locks and keys for each drop box.
2. Open the cover to verify that the container is empty.
3. Confirm that the location where the drop box is to be installed is in the view of video monitoring cameras.
4. Install the ballot drop box securely to the wall.
5. Close and lock the front panel.

⁶ Voter Registration Applications and Requests for Mail-in Ballots will most likely be returned in the same envelope, which is different than the mail-in ballot return envelope. However, an individual may choose to return these forms in separate or non-official envelopes, or in no envelope at all. When counting ballots returned to the office from the facility, the local board should count the total number of 1) mail-in ballot envelopes (ballot packets), and 2) all other voting information packet envelopes, non-official envelopes, and loose applications received and record both numbers on the Integrity Report.

6. Keep the keys in a secure location until the first visit by the local board.

On the first visit to the facility after installation, the local board shall:

1. Receive the keys from the facility representative.
2. Check that the ballot slot opening is clear.
3. Confirm that the keys unlock and lock each respective drop box.
4. Attach tamper tape to the drop box so that it attaches to the cover and box.
5. Record the tamper tape number on the *Integrity Report*.

Appendix - Visitor Restrictions and Rules for all State Correctional Facilities

Visitor Dress Code

All visitors must dress appropriately. All clothing must cover from the neck to the kneecaps.

The following types of clothing are not allowed to be worn:

- tube tops, tank tops, or halter tops
- see-through clothing
- mini-skirts, mini-dresses, shorts, skorts, or culottes (at or above the kneecap)
- form-fitting clothes such as leotards, spandex, and leggings
- clothes that expose a person's midriff, side, or back
- tops or dresses that have revealing necklines and/or excessive slits

Coats, jackets, shawls and scarves will be placed in an appropriate area.

Other Rules

- All visitors are subject to canine (if available), electronic drug detection device (if available), and/or visual searches prior to being admitted inside a facility. If you cannot clear the metal detector, you will be denied entry.
 - Note: Any visitors who have a medical metal device (wearable or surgically implanted) should bring a doctor's note or notify the officer before entering the metal detector.
 - Just like an airport, hats, shoes, belts, and jackets must be removed before going through the metal detector.
 - All women should note that an underwire bra will set off metal detectors.
- All visitors will be subject to a hand pat down after the metal detector screening. A female CO will always pat down a female visitor.
- All visitors 16 or older must present a valid state issued photo identification.
- Visitors must secure all cell phones, umbrellas, tobacco products and electronic devices (including smart watches and step trackers, standalone GPS tracking devices like Tile and AirTags, and headphones) in their vehicle. Rain jacket or poncho is allowed in bad or wet weather.
- Any bag brought into a facility other than a canvassing bag must be clear/transparent.
- Cash on hand maximum that can be brought into the facility is \$50 per person.
- Visitors with prior arrest histories are subject to review and can be rejected at any time.