



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

ELCAvotes: Voter guidelines for people facing homelessness

No state in the U.S. requires voters to have a physical home address in order to cast a ballot on Election Day. But nationally, people struggling with homelessness are extremely underrepresented when it comes to the ballot box. Often, people without a permanent home might be unaware of their voter eligibility, unfamiliar with ballot issues and unclear about election requirements. Others may be interested in sharing their voice through the ballot box but may not have the transportation means to do so.

Local ministries and advocacy groups can play a monumental role in ensuring inclusive access for all people interested in civic engagement and guaranteeing that no voice is lost in our democratic process. Churches engaged in the margins and faith activists are often the best positioned, and sometimes only, means to expand voter outreach to people struggling with homelessness. Here are some helpful tips for congregations interested in expanding the vote for people struggling with housing security in our communities.

"Where God's love for people who are homeless is heard and lived, hope is engendered that breaks the downward spiral of life. We walk with people who are homeless when they are empowered to defend their own rights. Is this a ministry which your congregation can and should offer?" (ELCA 1990 social message, "Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment").

Expand Voter Registration

- » Recruit a team or volunteer coordinator to organize a church voter registration campaign. Important duties often include researching local voter requirements, knowing registration deadlines, acquiring registration materials from a local board of elections and organizing congregation outreach. Read and share the [ELCA Civic Participation Guide](#) for more details on organizing a voting registration drive, including important church IRS guidelines for nonpartisan electoral activity, at elca.org/votes.
- » Learn your state's procedure for address designation. When registering a person to vote, an address is needed primarily for assigning people to precincts and mailing election information. On most registration forms, many state laws allow a shelter address or a description of a location where an individual usually spends the night. Some states even allow a drawn map to be recorded as an address. Every state has a different procedure, which can often be found at your local election bureau.
- » Request a vote-by-mail ballot or access alternatives if a person moves between registration and Election Day. They may still vote by



ELCAvotes:

Voter guidelines for people facing homelessness

returning to their former precinct.

- » Become familiar with existing locations for voter registration, which may already be familiar to people struggling with homelessness. Houses of worship, shelters, food pantries, soup kitchens, social service agencies and many other spaces may offer voter registration at their location.
- » Check with other partner service agencies to see if they have registration materials that are readily accessible for interested applicants. National law requires state governments to offer voter registration to any eligible person who applies for federal benefits at a public service office. Practice of this stipulation varies, so it may be helpful to encourage state offices that distribute federal benefits in your area to have registration material available at their location.

Plan before Election Day:

- » Promote voter education, interest and engagement through hosting dialogue events at your congregation, food bank or local venue. Community meetings and candidate forums centered around key public issues, such as home affordability, health care and more, are often great ways to increase participation.
- » Distribute signs and flyers to local shelters with absentee ballot information, Election Day open-hours and the location of your local voting station in the run-up to Election Day.
- » Contact local media groups to share your message and ministry's commitment to expanding voter engagement. Check out the [National Coalition for the Homelessness' Media Tips for Hosting Events](#) for help with organizing your church's media outreach.
- » Clarify voter ID rules in your state. Some eligible voters struggling with homelessness may not have the necessary identification documents to cast a ballot. If necessary, [refer to the Department of State](#) in your state to learn more about accessing voter ID cards ahead of Election Day.
- » Research what candidates are saying about issues relating to housing and homelessness or raise questions at local candidate forums. You can discuss policy differences with your congregation.

Mobilize on Election Day:

- » Consider making your congregation a polling site, or help your local shelter become a designated polling place. Contact your local elections office to learn more.
- » Organize a church or volunteer bus to bring people to the polls throughout the day.
- » Volunteer to be a poll watcher throughout the day to assist homeless people encountering any voting issues with local election officials.

DON'T ASSUME! DOUBLE CHECK!

- » Some formerly incarcerated individuals struggling with homelessness believe they are unable to vote if they have been convicted of a crime. However, many states actually allow convicted felons to vote after prison release, parole or probation. Check out resources from [the Sentencing Project](#) and your local board of elections to learn more.
- » Many people might believe they are registered to vote, but they may have been taken off the voter rolls due to out-of-date registration information. When registering people to vote, be sure to ask if they have updated their registration since the last time they have moved.