

Military Voter Overseas Technical Enhancement (VOTE) Act

Introduced by Congressman Sean Casten

Background: Since 1986, military members on active duty stationed away from their voting residence have been covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), which requires that states allow the estimated 1.31 million active duty members, approximately 549,000 of their eligible family members, and 2.8 million additional overseas citizens to vote absentee in federal elections.

Amendments made to UOCAVA through the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act now require that UOCAVA voters are provided with an option to request and receive registration and absentee ballot request materials electronically and directed states to establish an electronic means of transmitting blank ballots to UOCAVA voters. As of 2024, email was the most popular method of ballot transmission with 52% of UOCAVA ballots transmitted via email, and an additional 27% through online systems.

Unfortunately, members of the Armed Forces often still face barriers to full participation as voters. In 2022, 26% of military voters participated in the election, as compared to 48% of all voting-eligible Americans. Many who would have voted reported that the process of requesting an absentee ballot and a ballot not arriving prevented them from voting.

The Military VOTE Act strengthens voter access provisions in UOCAVA at the application and ballot-delivery stages. Specifically, it would:

- Require acceptance of voter registration and absentee requests online or by email.
- Require that states send ballots electronically by default when a voter hasn't selected a preference;
- Require that states provide absentee ballots for at least two federal elections, and for all elections thereafter if the voter receives their blank ballot electronically, without needing to reapply once a voter registers and requests an absentee ballot;
- Prohibit absentee ballot application rejections based off of early submission; and
- Task the Department of Defense with improving voter information for service members and studying automatic registration when they join or move.

Notably, this bill preserves current safeguards on the submission of completed ballots. It also defers to state law on delivery methods when electronic transmission is not possible.

With the Military VOTE Act, the Department of Defense and states can remove unnecessary barriers for service members and ensure reliable ballot access.

This legislation is endorsed by Responsive Government Action.