

Checks and Balances in Pennsylvania: Important Dates for the November 2026 Election

Pennsylvania's elections are governed by a number of laws and regulations that ensure there are checks and balances throughout the process. Bipartisan teams of election workers at the local, county, and state levels go through a meticulous list of steps to verify the count, check for accuracy, and ensure all rules are followed.

Below, we detail the dates for each step to provide greater transparency into the rigorous efforts underway to deliver a free and fair election in Pennsylvania. Importantly, this is nonpartisan educational research intended for 501(c)(3)-compliant purposes only. It is not to be used for any partisan, political, or electioneering activities by any organization.

Voting by Mail

- **[Monday, Sept. 14](#)** - First day ballots can be mailed. Counties begin processing applications for ballots, whether excuse-required absentee or no-excuse mail-in, 50 days before the election. Ballots are sent to people with approved [absentee](#) or [mail-in](#) applications as soon as they are available. Even if litigation delays mail-in ballots' availability, they [must be made available](#) by the second Tuesday before Election Day.
- **[Tuesday, Oct. 27](#)** - Deadline for voters to request an absentee or mail-in ballot is 5 p.m. Applications must be *received* by the appropriate county official by this date and time to be accepted.
- **Tuesday, Nov. 3 - Election Day**
 - **[7 a.m.](#)** - Election officials may begin verifying absentee and mail-in ballots received by that point.
 - **[8 p.m.](#)** - Voters must return their absentee and mail-in ballots so they are received by this time, the close of polls, regardless of return method.
 - **Note:** Following a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling in [Center for Coalfield Justice v. Washington County Board of Elections](#), county election officials must inform voters when their mail ballots are disqualified due to errors, such as missing dates or signatures. They must also allow these voters to cast a provisional ballot in person.
- **[Friday, Nov. 6](#)** - County election officials must begin verifying absentee and mail-in ballots.

In-Person Voting (Early & Election Day)

- **Sept. 14 - Oct. 27** - As soon as mail-in ballots are available, people may apply for them in person, vote them, and return them. Even if litigation delays their availability, they [must be made available](#) by the second Tuesday before Election Day.
- **[Monday, Oct. 19](#)** - Voter registration deadline.
- **[Tuesday, Oct. 27](#)** - Last day of the in-person early voting period. Early voting ends with the mail-in ballot application deadline at 5 p.m.
- **[Tuesday, Nov. 3](#) - Election Day**
 - **7 a.m.** - Polling locations open.
 - **8 p.m.** - Polling locations close. All voters [still in line](#) must be allowed to vote.

Counting, Canvassing, & Certification

- **[Tuesday, Nov. 3](#) - Election Day**
 - **7 a.m.** - County boards of elections may begin counting absentee and mail-in ballots as part of a "pre-canvassing" meeting.
 - **8 p.m.** - County boards of elections may begin canvassing absentee and mail-in ballots.¹
- **[Wednesday, Nov. 4 at 3 a.m.](#)** - Deadline for county boards of elections to transmit the general returns from polling places to the state.
- **[Friday, Nov. 6](#)** - County boards must begin to canvass the results at 9 a.m. and continue until they finish. When they finish, the results are considered unofficial for five days. The statute does not specify *calendar* or *business* days.
- **[Tuesday, Nov. 10](#)** - Deadline for counties to submit their unofficial results to the Department of State, although they are submitted whenever the results are complete and could be before this deadline.
- **[Saturday, Nov. 15](#)** (or five days after county submission of unofficial results) - Unofficial county results become official and are certified by the county five days after they have been submitted to the Department of State, unless a recanvass or recount is underway, or a court has ordered otherwise.²
- **[State Certification](#)** - After all counties have certified their results, the secretary of the commonwealth canvasses the results and certifies them. Statutory law does not set a specific deadline.

¹ "Canvassing" is the process by which the appropriate authority checks the results from each voting location and ballot counting location for accuracy and compliance with statutory procedures. After these checks, the results from each location are compiled to create results for each race on the ballot. In Pennsylvania, the county canvass is conducted by county boards of elections. The state canvass is conducted by the secretary of the commonwealth.

² "Certification" is the process by which winners in elections are officially declared, following completion of the canvass. For local races that can be determined following the county canvass, certification will occur after the county canvass. For federal, state, and multicounty races that must be determined by the state canvass, certification will generally occur immediately following completion of the state canvass.

Recounts & Election Contests

- [Tuesday, Nov. 3 - Tuesday, Nov. 10](#) - The county board of elections will recanvass any district in which it believes there is a discrepancy in the returns.
- [Thursday, Nov. 12](#) (or two days after a county submits unofficial returns to the state) - Deadline for anyone contesting any order or decision of a county board of elections regarding counting, canvassing, recounting, or recanvassing to appeal to the appropriate court.³
- [Thursday, Nov. 12](#) - The secretary of the commonwealth must order an automatic statewide recount by this date for any statewide race for which unofficial returns show the margin in the race is less than 0.5%.
- [Sunday, Nov. 15](#) (or five days after a county submits unofficial returns to the state) - Deadline for three voters of an election district to petition the appropriate court for a recanvass or a recount of their election district by alleging, under oath, an error or fraud in their district's returns. Upon receipt of proper papers and filing fee:
 - [Recanvassing tabulators/voting machines](#): If the alleged fraud or error requires recanvassing voting machines, the court will order the machines' registering ballot counters exposed so they can be seen and recanvassed. Ballots are not re-tabulated. This recanvass can take place any time after the court order through 20 days after the election.
 - [Recounting ballots in ballot boxes](#): If the alleged fraud or error requires opening a ballot box to be recounted, the court will order the election district recounted. This recount can occur up to four months after Election Day.
- [Monday, Nov. 23](#) - Deadline for groups of voters who participated in the election to file a petition contesting the results of an election for any office [other than governor or lieutenant governor](#). The number of voters who must attest to the filings varies with the office being contested.

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³ Appeals concerning the conduct of an automatic recount ordered by the Secretary of the Commonwealth must be filed in the Commonwealth Court. All other appeals must be filed in the court of common pleas with jurisdiction over the election in question.