

GEORGIA SECRETARY OF STATE’S OFFICE CLEANS VOTER FILE BY 4% AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(ATLANTA) – The Georgia Secretary of State’s Office is making routine and legally required updates to Georgia’s voter file that will reduce the size of the voter roll by 4 percent. These updates are required by federal and state law in order to ensure that the state has the most up-to-date voter information.

“Election security is my top priority,” said Secretary Raffensperger. “Accurate and up-to-date voter rolls are vital to secure elections, but at the same time I want to ensure that anyone potentially affected by this routine process has notice and opportunity to update their information. That is why my office is releasing the full list to ensure that people who are still eligible voters can update their information.”

The Georgia General Assembly passed additional laws in 2019 requiring election officials to mail a personalized notice to the last known address of people prior to removing them from the voter rolls due to a change in address. Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has decided to take the additional step of posting the list of people online.

“States like Nevada, Minnesota, Colorado, Arizona, Illinois, Maryland and Vermont have similar rates of cancellations due to people moving as Georgia,” said Jordan Fuchs Deputy Secretary of State. “The 4 percent rate that we are seeing is similar to what states across the country are seeing.”

Next week, election officials will mail a notice to the last known address of people who have been in “inactive” status for more than three years and had no contact with election officials during that time. A registration is moved to “inactive” status when the person fails to respond to a pre-addressed, postage paid confirmation card asking them to confirm or update their information. The confirmation card is required to be sent to people who have filed a National Change of Address Card with the U.S. Postal Service indicating that they have moved to a new address, had election mail returned as undeliverable, or did not have any contact with election officials (including not voting) for the three prior years.

The process started under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, signed into federal law by then-President Bill Clinton. Additional laws were passed in Georgia regarding list maintenance in 1994 by a Democrat majority General Assembly and signed into law by a Democrat Governor. Lastly, these laws were implemented by a Democrat Georgia Secretary of State.

Both federal and state law require election officials to conduct list maintenance on registration records where the person has died or moved to a different address. Georgia law specifically requires elections officials to remove registration records that have been in “inactive” status for two general elections and have had no contact with election officials during that time.

“Accurate voter lists limit confusion and delays at polling places on Election Day, and make sure voters get the correct ballot,” said Chris Harvey, Elections Director for the Secretary of State’s Office. “Accurate registration lists also allow county election offices to plan for polling place equipment and staffing needs. Accurate voter lists reduce the opportunities for mistakes or fraud.”

“Keeping accurate lists assures the public that our election system works well and that the results are fair,” notes David Becker, the executive director of the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation and Research, in a blog post last year. “...Good list maintenance is good for democracy, not just because it means more efficient elections, but because it confirms to the electorate that the vote isn’t rigged.”

The Georgia law requiring moving registrants who have had “no contact” with election officials to “inactive” status if they fail to return the confirmation card was challenged in court in 2016, but the lawsuit was dismissed. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a similar Ohio law in 2018.

A bipartisan state law enacted in 2019 added an additional notification to people whose registrations are subject to cancellation in addition to the initial notice. That new notification will be mailed out next week.

Raffensperger is initiating an additional feature beyond the notice required by the 2019 law. As a convenience to those on the list, the notice they get in the mail will include a postage-paid postcard that they can simply sign and drop into any mailbox, no stamps required. He also decided to post the list online.

Anyone can search the list of registrations that are subject to cancellation. Only information that is public pursuant to state law is included. If your name is on the list and you are still an eligible Georgia voter, you can simply update your registration at <https://registertovote.sos.ga.gov> or contact your county elections office. You may also respond to the confirmation card that will be included with the notice, but keep in mind that the notice is mailed to your last known address of your voter registration, which may not be accurate if you have moved and not updated your registration. Any registered voter can check their registration information to confirm it is accurate and up-to-date at <https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov>.

The list contains 313,243 records, or about 4 percent of Georgia’s total number of registered voters, which is in line with the number of records cancelled by other states according to the 2018 Election Administration and Voting Survey conducted by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. The number is less than the census estimates of people moving out of Georgia during the two-year period since the state last conducted this routine list maintenance process.

Of the inactive registration list, 108,306, or 34.6 percent, filed a change of address request with the U.S. Postal Service showing they have moved to a different county or state. Another 84,376, or 26.9 percent, had election mail returned as undeliverable.

The remaining 120,561, or 38.5 percent, have had no contact with their county election officials since prior to the 2012 presidential election and failed to respond to a confirmation card sent by their county elections office. Contact is usually in the form of voting – either in person or absentee, but updating their registration, signing a petition, or requesting an absentee ballot also counts. Renewing or updating their driver’s license will also count as a contact with election officials unless the person opts out.

The list of registrations subject to cancellation can be viewed here:

https://sos.ga.gov/admin/uploads/2019_NGE_List.xlsx

How a registration becomes subject to cancellation:

Step 1:

A registered voter files a change of address request with the U.S. Postal Service or

Official election mail is returned undeliverable or

A person has no contact with elections officials for three years. Contact can be in the form of voting in any election or primary, signing a petition, updating voter registration, or renewing or changing a driver’s license.

Step 2:

Not responding to a confirmation letter mailed by the county voter registrar.

Step 3:

Having no contact with voter registration for two additional general elections, meaning not voting in any election or primary, signing a petition, updating voter registration or renewing or changing a driver’s license.

Step 4:

Failing to respond within 30 days of the notice which they are being sent by either

- a. returning the attached postage-paid postcard they will receive or
- b. updating their registration
 1. on registertovote.sos.ga.gov
 2. smartphone app, or
 3. visiting their county voter registrar’s office.