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NEW LAW ALLOWS NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING; NOW IT'S EVEN EASIER TO VOTE IN ILLINOIS

SPRINGFIELD, IL, Nov. 5, 2009 – State lawmakers approved several election bills this spring to make it even easier to register and vote.

Building on the record turnout of people voting in person at Early Voting Centers without having to give a reason to vote early, lawmakers expanded the no-excuse principle to absentee voting by mail.

Beginning with the Feb. 2, 2010 statewide primary election, Illinois voters will be able to request and vote a mail-in absentee ballot without specifying a reason for the absence from the polling place on Election Day. The new law, Public Act, 96-0553, allows eligible voters to apply for an absentee ballot in late December.

Grace Period Registration also has been extended an additional week. Under the terms of Public Act 96-0441, the grace period for registration extends until the seventh day before the election. Thus, for the primary, eligible voters can register, or people already registered can change their address, at the office of the election authority until Tuesday, Jan. 26.

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However, the law requires that people who register during the grace period – and desire to vote in the primary - must vote at the same office or by mail at the discretion of the election authority. Those people are not allowed to vote at an Early Voting Center or at a polling place on Election Day.

The traditional deadline for registering for the primary is Jan. 5.

Public Act 96-0317 also adds identification that is acceptable for voter registration. A lease or contract for a residence is now an acceptable form of proof of a voter's residence. Also, a photo identification card issued by a university or college and mail addressed to the voter at the address of residence is acceptable proof.

Another new law, Public Act 96-0637, requires that permanent Early Voting Centers designated in certain municipalities and counties must remain open additional hours on holidays during the Early Voting period and on the final weekend of the Early Voting period.

When registering to vote in person, two forms of identification are required – one must show the current address of the applicant.

The requirements to register to vote are: be a citizen of the United States; be at least 18 years old by Election Day; have been a resident of the precinct at least 30 days prior to Election Day.

Illinois residents now may check their registration online by going to www.elections.il.gov and clicking “Voting and Elections” and then clicking “Am I Registered” at the top of the page.

The Early Voting period for the primary runs from Monday Jan. 11 through Thursday Jan. 28. The specific hours of operation for the Early Voting Centers will be announced by the election authorities.

The State Board of Elections is an independent state agency charged with the responsibility of having general supervision over the administration of election laws of the State.

Elections are administered locally by the State's 110 election authorities.

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