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EARLY VOTING BEGINS JANUARY 14

SPRINGFIELD, IL, December 13, 2007 - Eligible voters in Illinois can cast a primary election ballot beginning January 14 without having to provide a reason or an excuse for wanting to vote early.

With the primary election moved up six weeks to February 5, 2008, and the early voting law in effect for the first time for a Presidential election, Illinois voters will be voting earlier than ever for President.

Early voting begins Monday, January 14, 22 days prior to the election, and concludes on Thursday, January 31, the fifth day prior to the election. So, for the first time in an Illinois Presidential election, voters will be able to go to an early voting center, fill out a ballot application and vote.

Election authorities across the state will identify locations for early voting centers and the hours the centers will be open. In almost all cases, the early voting centers will be different from the voters' regular polling place. Early voting must be done by personal appearance.

Approximately nine percent of the vote cast in the 2006 general election was cast early, either by absentee ballot or the new early voting designation.

In Illinois elections prior to 2006, voters who wanted to vote early had to request an absentee ballot and offer a reason or an excuse – such as being out of their county of residence on Election Day.

Absentee voting laws remain in place for the primary election. For example, persons who are physically incapacitated and persons out of the county on Election Day can still cast an absentee vote by mail or in person by providing a reason as required under law.

Early voting law requires that a registered voter show valid photo identification to an election official before voting early. Voters casting an early ballot must display a current driver's license, a state-issued ID card or another government-issued ID with a photograph. The photo identification requirement is stricter than any identification requirement for a person casting a ballot at their polling place on Election Day.

The law prohibits a person who voted during the early voting period from voting at the polls on Election Day. The votes cast during at an early voting center will not be counted until Election Day.

Approximately 35 other states allow some form of early voting.

The last date to register to vote for the Illinois primary is January 8.

On February 5, voters cast ballots to nominate candidates for President, U.S. Senate, Representatives in Congress, State Senators and Representatives in the General Assembly, certain county offices and judicial vacancies.

The primary election system is established by state law. A voter can vote for candidates of one party only. In some areas, nonpartisan candidates or referenda may be voted on in the primary, and if a voter does not want to declare a party affiliation, he or she may request a nonpartisan ballot only.

Elections are administered locally by the State's 110 election authorities. These are county clerks in 101 counties, one county election commission and eight municipal election commissions.

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

For more information, contact election authorities or visit the Board's website www.elections.il.gov.