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VOTER REGISTRATION EXTENDED

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, Jan. 8, 2008 – The deadline to register to vote in the Feb. 5 primary election has been extended to Jan. 22.

Under the terms of a state law effective for the first time during an Illinois Presidential election, eligible voters are granted a “grace period” for registering to vote. However, the law restricts where people may register during the grace period and how they cast a ballot.

The normal registration period closes 28 days prior to the election. The grace period for voter registration is the 27th to the 14th day prior to the election, or, in the case of the primary, Jan. 9-22.

The Illinois primary is Feb. 5, six weeks earlier than the last Illinois primary.

Eligible voters may register during the grace period only at the office of their election authority. Elections are administered locally by the State’s 110 election authorities. These are the county clerks in 101 counties, one county election commission and eight municipal election commissions.

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To be eligible, a person must be a U.S. citizen, 18 years old by Election Day and a resident of his or her precinct for 30 days prior to Election Day.

During 2006, the first year for grace period registration, 2,367 people registered for the primary and 6,524 registered for the November general election.

People who register during the grace period must vote in the office of the election authority or vote absentee by mail. People who register during the grace period do not go to their polling place on Election Day, nor are they allowed to vote at early voting centers.

Early voting, also new in 2006, allows registered voters the option of voting between Jan. 14 and Jan. 31 without having to give a reason or an excuse for wanting to vote early. Persons utilizing the new early voting option cast ballots at early voting centers, locations which are announced by election authorities. In almost all cases, the early voting centers will be different from the voters' regular polling place.

In the November 2006 general election, approximately nine percent of the vote – counting early votes, grace period votes and absentee votes – was cast prior to Election Day.

Absentee voting laws remain in place. Unlike an early voter, a person seeking an absentee ballot by law must provide a reason for voting absentee. The most common reasons for voting absentee are a physical incapacitation or traveling outside the county on Election Day. Persons who desire an absentee ballot should contact their election authority for an application.

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 on grace period registration, early voting, absentee voting or the primary election, contact election authorities in each county or visit the Board's website www.elections.il.gov.