

Rosemarie Malone

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES INCOME MAINTENANCE ADMINISTRATION 311 W. Saratoga Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201	DHR ACTION TRANSMITTAL
ISSUANCE DATE: December 18, 1995	EFFECTIVE DATE: December 1995
	CONTROL NUMBER: IMA OQA #96-22

TO: DIRECTORS, LOCAL DEPARTMENTS of SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPUTY/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS FOR INCOME MAINTENANCE

FROM: *Katherine L. Cook*
KATHERINE L. COOK, ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IMA

RE: NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT of 1993

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: ALL PROGRAMS

ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE/DIVISION OF
MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

BACKGROUND:

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993 became effective on January 1, 1995. The intent of NVRA is to increase the number of citizens registered to vote and to establish safeguards that ensure all citizens' right to vote. NVRA, is widely known as the "Motor Voter Act" because it requires voter registration to be available at motor vehicle offices. The law also requires state public assistance offices to offer voter registration and assistance. Additional provisions include mail-in voter registrations, specific public information requirements, and detailed record-keeping procedures.

Action Transmittal IMA OPA #95-39, dated January 1, 1995, provided instructions for the implementation of NVRA to the local departments of social services. Maryland's efforts to register applicants/clients in the local departments of social services are being closely monitored by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). ACORN questioned whether a sufficient number of applicants/clients were being registered by the local departments of social services. DHR contends that the local offices are essentially meeting the requirements of the law. However, we did agree to provide further clarification to AT #95-39.

This Action Transmittal restates the requirements of NVRA and makes AT 95-39 obsolete. Additionally, effective December 1, 1995, state level coordination of voter registration activities will transfer from the Office of Policy Administration to the Office of Quality Assurance. Finally, the Voter Registration Report (DHR 779), was modified to capture the full range of voter registration activities taking place in the local department of social services. The expanded reporting format of the DHR 779 is not an indication of incomplete reporting in the past. Instead, the added information demonstrates our comprehensive effort to implement voter registration.

ACTION REQUIRED:**Designation of Public Agencies as Voter Registration Agencies**

Federal law requires that all offices which provide public assistance be designated as "Voter Registration Agencies." As such, each local department of social services is a Voter Registration Agency.

Voter Registration Coordinators (Appointment and Duties)

At every IMA service delivery site, a staff person shall be designated to serve as the **Voter Registration Site Coordinator**. Also, one person in each local department of social services shall be designated the **Local Department Voter Registration Coordinator**. The Local Department Coordinator may be one of the Site Coordinators.

Procedure:

1. The local department administration shall designate a staff person at each service delivery site to serve as the Voter Registration Site Coordinator.
2. One staff person in each local department shall be designated the Local Department Voter Registration Coordinator.
3. The local department administration shall forward the names and contact telephone numbers of the Site Coordinators and the Local Department Coordinator to the DHR NVRA Liaison:

William Lunsford
DHR NVRA Agency Liaison
IMA OQA/DMS
311 Saratoga Street, Room 632
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

The deadline for submission is January 14, 1996.

Duties of Voter Registration Site Coordinators

The Voter Registration Site Coordinators shall have the following duties:

- Maintain a supply of voter registration forms for general public use in the reception area of each service delivery site. An additional supply of forms shall be maintained for worker use during client interviews. Minimum supplies of 100 registration forms shall be available in the reception area and for worker use.
- Collect daily the voter registration application forms completed by applicant/recipients in both the reception area and in interviews with workers.
- Bundle the completed voter registration application forms and mail to the local board of elections each

Friday, or the last workday of the week if Friday is a holiday. **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES ARE COMPLETED VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS TO BE KEPT IN THE OFFICE FOR A PERIOD OF MORE THAN FIVE CONSECUTIVE WORKING DAYS.**

- Collect daily the copies of DHR Form 784, Voter Registration Agency Certification, completed by applicants/clients during interviews with workers. Tabulate the applicant/client responses on the Form 784, and send the summary data to the Local Department Voter Registration Coordinator each Monday, or the first workday of the week.

Duties of the Local Department Voter Registration Coordinators

The Local Department Voter Registration Coordinators shall have the following duties:

- Coordinate voter registration activities for all service delivery sites within the local department of social services.
- Serve as the local department liaison to the local board of elections and DHR's NVRA Liaison. Establish contact with the person at the local board of elections who is responsible for the receipt of completed voter registration application forms, and from whom voter registration application forms and other supplies are to be ordered.
- Maintain a sufficient stock of voter registration applications, Voter Registration Agency Certifications (DHR 784) and Voter Registration Reports (DHR 779) to ensure that the number of forms available at each service delivery site does not fall below 200.
- Reorder supplies of voter registration application forms and posters from the local board of election supervisors as needed. Reorder supplies of the Voter Registration Report (DHR 779), and the Voter Registration Agency Certification (DHR 784) from the DHR Warehouse as needed.
- Tabulate weekly the client responses on Form 784 from all of the service delivery sites. On the first workday of each month, total the categories of responses on the DHR 784 for the previous month for all service delivery sites, and send the totals to the DHR NVRA Liaison.

Display and Dissemination of Voter Registration Forms and Information

Each agency must provide space, fully accessible to the public, for the display and dissemination of voter registration forms and information about voter registration. The display space must be stocked with voter registration forms provided by the local board of elections.

Procedure:

1. Each Voter Registration Site Coordinator shall acquire voter registration posters and supplies of voter registration forms from the Department Voter Registration Coordinator.
2. The Site Coordinator shall display the poster(s) in an open public area in a highly visible manner. A supply of voter registration application forms must be openly displayed for self-service pick-up by the general public. The local department is not required to staff the voter registration display.
3. It is suggested that the Site Coordinator set up a drop-in-box adjacent to the supply of voter registration applications to facilitate the collection and mailing of completed voter registration applications. **IF A DROP-IN BOX IS SET UP IN THE OFFICE, THE SITE COORDINATOR SHALL REMOVE THE COMPLETED FORMS AT THE END OF EACH BUSINESS DAY. THE COMPLETED FORMS MUST BE HELD IN A SECURE LOCATION UNTIL THEY ARE FORWARDED TO THE LOCAL BOARD OF ELECTIONS.**

Distribution of Voter Registration Forms at Face-to Face Interviews

- Each Voter Registration Agency must offer a voter registration form:
- At application, to every person who applies for services or assistance;
- At each recertification, to every client who receives services or assistance; and
- Upon notification of a change of address provided by a client.

Procedure:

1. At every face-to-face interview the applicant/client must be offered an opportunity to register to vote. Face-to-face interviews include the initial application for services or benefits; and for clients, the redetermination/recertification of eligibility, and interim visits to the office to report a change of circumstances.
2. The offer to register to vote includes the actual offer of a voter registration form to the applicant/client.
3. Following the offer of a registration form, the applicant/client may respond to the offer in any one of the following ways:
 - decline to register (either already registered or does not wish to register);

- complete the form without assistance;
- complete the form with assistance;
- take the registration form home to complete, and either return it to the office at a later time, or mail the form directly to the board of elections;
- complete a registration form in the office (with or without assistance) and take additional forms home for other household members to complete.

Provision of Staff Assistance in Filling Out a Registration Form

The Voter Registration Agency must offer to assist the applicant/client in completion of the voter registration form. If the applicant/client accepts the offer, the agency must provide assistance.

Procedure:

1. Determine whether the applicant/client wishes to register to vote. If the answer is "Yes", then determine whether the applicant/client desires assistance in completing the application.
2. Provide assistance in completing the form to the applicant/client requesting assistance.
3. Review the form to determine whether all required information was provided. A valid registration form must include the following:
 - identifying information, i.e. name and address;
 - information relating to previous registration, if applicable;
 - the applicant's/client's date of birth and place of birth; and
 - a signature in the two places indicated on the form.
4. Check the identifying information, date of birth and previous registration information for legibility.

Completion of the Voter Registration Agency Certification (DHR Form 784)

At every face-to-face interview the worker shall certify that the applicant/client was offered an opportunity to register to vote by having the applicant/client complete and sign a copy of the Voter Registration Agency Certification (DHR 784). Form 784 contains language required by NVRA which includes the following:

- A statement of whether the applicant/client wishes to register to vote at the time of the interview.

- A statement which informs the applicant/client that the decision regarding voter registration will not effect the benefits received from the agency.
- A statement of an offer to assist the applicant/client to complete the voter registration application if assistance is desired.
- A statement that no one has interfered with the applicant's/client's right to register to vote, and if the applicant/client feels the right to register was interfered with, instructions for filing a complaint with the State Administrative Board of Election Laws (SABEL).

Procedure:

1. The DHR 784 meets the language requirements of the National Voter Registration Act.
2. In conjunction with the statements included on the DHR 784, staff members are specifically prohibited from the following:
 - directly or indirectly seeking to influence an applicant/client's political preference or party, or to answer any question regarding party affiliation other than the fact that one must belong to a party in order to vote in a primary election;
 - making any statement or taking any action that would discourage voter registration; or
 - making any statement to an applicant/client that would lead to belief that the decision regarding voter registration will have an effect on the amount of benefits to be provided by the agency.
3. **LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (LDSS) STAFF MEMBERS ARE REMINDED THAT THEY ARE NOT AGENTS OF THE LOCAL BOARD OF ELECTIONS OR THE STATE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD OF ELECTION LAWS. THEREFORE, LDSS STAFF MEMBERS ARE NOT TO MAKE DECISIONS AS TO THE ELIGIBILITY OF ANY PERSON TO REGISTER.**

Change of Address Requests by Telephone

A client who provides a change of address by telephone must be offered an opportunity to register to vote.

Procedure:

When a change of address is reported by telephone, the worker must ask whether the client desires to register.

1. If the client says "Yes", the worker shall mail a voter registration application form. The client has the option to mail the application directly to the local

board of elections or return the completed application in person to the service delivery site. Applications returned to the service delivery site are handled as if the application was completed in the office.

2. If the client says "No" or declines a mailed application form, the worker will wait until the client's next face-to-face interview to again ask whether there is an interest in registering to vote.

CONTACT:

Please direct questions to William Lunsford at (410) 767-7948.

KLC:wgl
Attachments

cc: DHR Executive Staff
IMA Management Staff