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### Opinion: Professor Kresse on Vote by Mail

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# Opinion: Professor Kresse on Vote by Mail



Are you one of millions of Americans who want to vote in this year's election, but due to COVID-19 you are planning to vote by mail? But you have concerns that your vote might not get counted?

Understandable.

I am here to help alleviate those concerns.

I am Professor Bill Kresse. In addition to being an Associate Professor in the Governors State College of Business, I am one of the three Commissioners of the Chicago Board of Elections – the agency that runs elections in the City of Chicago. While these tips about voting by mail are most useful to Chicago voters, they are generally applicable for all Illinois voters. (Sorry, Indiana voters, your election laws are different, so check out <https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/>)

First, anyone can vote by mail (or VBM, for short). Unlike in the past, when you needed an accepted reason to do so (in the hospital, traveling, etc.), Illinois voters don't need a reason to choose VBM. Of course, you first must be a registered voter. If you have an Illinois driver's license or State ID you can register online at the website of the Illinois State Board of Elections (ISBE): <https://www.elections.il.gov/>. But hurry! The last day to register online is October 18.

Once registered, you need to request a VBM ballot. Unlike some states, Illinois doesn't just mail out a ballot to each voter; you must request a VBM ballot. You can request a VBM ballot (and check on your registration, too) at the same ISBE link above. The deadline for requesting a VBM ballot is October 29, but do it now to avoid the rush!

You'll then get your VBM ballot in the mail. So, what do you do to make sure your vote gets counted? As a professor, I'm often telling my students, "Read the syllabus." Well, my advice as an Election Commissioner is similar: "Read the instructions." Along with your VBM ballot will be detailed instructions. Your election authorities worked hard to write these instructions as clearly as possible. But if you still have questions, just give your local election authority a call.

While the instructions are more thorough, they basically boil down to this:

- Vote your ballot (following the instructions on how to do this). And do it privately! The secret ballot was a long-battled right. Let's keep it secret!
- Place your ballot in the return envelope.
- Seal the envelope. (Important! Ballots can be rejected if the envelope is not sealed.)
- Fill in the information required on the front of the envelope and sign your name in the space provided. (Important! Ballots can be rejected if the envelope front is not completed or if there is no signature. More on signatures below.)
- Drop your envelope in a mailbox or in a designated official ballot drop box. (Important! While many jurisdictions use postage-paid envelopes, some do not, which means you may need to apply postage to your envelope. Again, read the instructions. More on mailing and drop boxes below.)
- Sit back and know you have done your civic duty!

Signatures: one way that your election authority can verify that your VBM ballot is from you is by comparing the signature on the outside of the VBM return envelope to the signature specimen that your election authority has on file for you. Each VBM return envelope will be reviewed by a panel of three election judges, no more than two from the same political party. If they determine that a signature on a VBM return envelope does not match the signature on file, the ballot will be rejected. So, be sure to sign your VBM envelope in the same way that you would sign other important documents; that way your ballot is less likely to be rejected.

By the way, if you are concerned that your ballot may be rejected because your signature has significantly changed over the years, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners allows Chicago voters to file a signature update form.

(See: <https://chicagoelections.gov/en/register-to-vote-change-of-address.html>). Voters in other jurisdictions will need to contact their election authority.

But what if your ballot is rejected for not being sealed, no signature, etc.? No worries! If your ballot is rejected, your election authority will contact you and explain what you need to do so your ballot will be counted.

Mail vs. drop boxes: VBM ballots can be returned to your election authority either by mail or by drop boxes. If you mail back your ballot, it must be postmarked by Election Day, November 3. Just dropping it into a mailbox on November 3 may be too late, as the ballot must be postmarked on or before November 3. Once it is postmarked on time, the Post Office has until November 17 to get it to your election authority.

Alternatively, deposit your VBM ballot into a drop box that your local election authority has placed for this purpose. The deadline depositing a VBM ballot in a drop box is 7:00 pm CT on November 3. A listing of drop box locations is available at the ISBE link above.

Good luck and be sure to vote!