

Automatic Voter Registration in Connecticut

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Issue

Does Connecticut have automatic voter registration (AVR)?

Summary

Connecticut is in the process of implementing an AVR system pursuant to a May 16, 2016, memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Office of the Secretary of the State (SOTS) and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) (see attachment). The MOU establishes a method, process, and timeline for developing the system, which must be fully implemented by August 7, 2018. Currently, DMV is operating an interim system with components that are not fully electronic.

“Automatic voter registration” generally refers to a process by which eligible individuals who interact with certain government agencies, such as DMV, are automatically registered to vote, unless they decline registration. In turn, the agencies electronically transfer the voter registration information to election officials.

AVR System Requirements Under the MOU

The MOU between SOTS and DMV was preceded by an April 15, 2016, letter from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) notifying the state that it was not fully compliant with Section 5 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), also known as the “Motor Voter” law. Generally, Motor Voter requires states to offer eligible citizens the opportunity to register to vote by applying as part of a motor vehicle driver’s license application or renewal ([52 U.S.C. § 20504](#)). (For additional information on the NVRA, including voter registration eligibility and Motor Voter compliance, see [OLR Report 2016-R-0104](#).)

According to SOTS, when DOJ contacted Connecticut only 4% of the state's voter registrations came through DMV. The MOU indicates that SOTS and DMV entered into the agreement to implement AVR "in furtherance of streamlining and simplifying the voter registration process contemplated in the NVRA and related Connecticut laws...." Among other things, it requires that the agencies (1) develop a written plan by July 1, 2017, describing the method, timeline, and process to jointly develop and implement the AVR system and (2) implement the system by August 7, 2018.

Under the MOU, Connecticut's AVR system must, among other things:

1. establish a schedule and method for DMV to electronically provide registrars of voters with the records of individuals who apply for or renew a DMV credential (i.e., driver's license or identity card);
2. allow individuals who submit DMV credential applications to change their voter registration status or record;
3. provide a way for records transmitted by the AVR system to constitute a completed voter registration application, and for registrars of voters to register applicants to vote unless an applicant is ineligible to vote, declines registration, or does not attest to meeting all voter eligibility requirements;
4. designate party preference as "unaffiliated" for a registrant who does not provide a preference; and
5. provide a way for applicants, as part of their voter registration application, to swear or affirm that they are U.S. citizens and meet all other voter eligibility requirements.

The AVR system must enable DMV to provide registrars of voters with certain information about applicants, including name; birthdate; driver's license or identification card number, or last four digits of the Social Security number; whether the individual affirmatively declined to register to vote; and political party preference. The MOU prohibits DMV from electronically transmitting through the AVR system the records of individuals who (1) were issued a DMV credential but were not U.S. citizens at the time of issuance or (2) have a "drive only" license, indicating that they cannot establish their legal presence in the U.S. or may not have a Social Security number. (For more information on the state's Drive-Only License program, see [DMV's website](#).)

KS:cmg