

# ACLU: Some Utah county clerks need to step up their game to be ready for Election Day registration



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Link: <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2018/10/12/aclu-some-utah-county/>

ACLU of Utah Press Release: <https://www.acluutah.org/newsroom/item/1492-aclu-survey-finds-some-counties-in-utah-unprepared-for-election-day-registration-this-november>

On Nov. 6, Utahns will be able to walk into polling places across the state and exercise a same-day registration option created earlier this year to clear away barriers to voting.

But the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah is worried that not all elections officials are prepared for the new provision.

The civil rights advocacy group Thursday called on Utah Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox and the state elections office to make sure that all county clerks offices are up to speed on the Election Day registration provision passed by the Legislature as part of a larger [package of voting reforms](#). The ACLU recently surveyed clerks offices in eight Utah counties to gauge their level of familiarity with the new voting option. They were not pleased with their findings.

“Voting is a fundamental right in our democracy and smart ideas like letting people register to vote on Election Day will reduce roadblocks to exercising that right,” Brittney Nystrom, the group’s executive director, said in a prepared statement. “But these innovations will only work if they are supported by well-informed county clerks, trained poll workers, and with sound oversight from the state’s top election officials.”

Only two of the counties surveyed had posted information about the new same-day registration option on their websites, an ACLU news release stated. Some of the offices linked to the state’s election site but not to pages that explained the new process.

In another source of heartburn for the ACLU, three of the clerks offices weren’t able to confirm that the Election Day registration process would be folded into training for poll workers. Jason Lee, state elections director for Cox, said his office sent the ACLU’s findings to county clerks across the state and encouraged them to update their websites and educate poll workers about the new option.

"The county clerks, they really have a huge job running the elections, and they do generally a very good job at it. If there's little things that can be fixed and updated, we have all the confidence in the world that they will," he said.

Rep. Rebecca Chavez-Houck, D-Salt Lake City, who [sponsored the bill enabling Election Day registration](#), said the option accommodates well-meaning voters who accidentally miss the deadline to sign up. And there are a variety of reasons someone might not show up in the voter rolls even if they do try to register.

“The failsafe provision of an Election Day option is important to me because ... it could be an administrative snafu. Sometimes, that happens, and it's not the fault of the citizen,” she said. People who want to use the same-day option must bring their identification and a proof of residency to the polling place to demonstrate their voting eligibility. Once that’s done, they fill out a provisional ballot that doubles as their voter registration form.

Election workers count the ballot once they've verified it.

The ACLU declined to identify the eight counties involved in its phone survey, saying it didn’t think it was productive to call out specific offices.

“The reason was not to sort of name county clerks or point any fingers or create any blame but really as a public service announcement. There’s still an opportunity to make sure everyone is on the same page,” Marina Lowe, legislative and policy counsel for the ACLU, said.

The Election Day registration option is not new for Utah counties that participated in a [three-year pilot program](#) created in 2014 to test the concept. Salt Lake County was one of the jurisdictions that volunteered for the pilot program, County Clerk Sherrie Swensen said. Her office’s website does include some information about the process, but Swensen said she isn’t highlighting the option just yet because she wants voters to focus on registering through traditional methods.

"Here's the concern: If people take same-day registration, they have to provide ID and proof of residency, and that isn't the most efficient way for them to vote," she said.

During this year’s primary, Salt Lake County voters cast 617 provisional ballots, with 137 coming through the same-day registration process. Swensen said election workers were able to verify and count about 80 percent of the provisional ballots.

She said her staff is encouraging people to [register online](#) or at her office by the Oct. 30 deadline.