



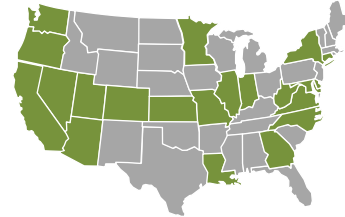
## LWV Position and Overview: Online Voter Registration

### Improving Online Voter Registration

Online voter registration is a critical step to bringing our voting systems into the 21st century; however, most of the systems implemented thus far leave out a significant and important part of the population -- citizens who don't have a driver's license or non-driver's ID. The League is committed to ensuring that every eligible voter can register and update their registration through online systems [including those who do not have driver's license or non-driver photo Id and signature on file with the state.](#)

At least 23 states — currently or will soon offer online voter registration.

[Arizona](#), [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Connecticut](#), [Delaware](#), [Georgia](#), [Hawaii](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Kansas](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Minnesota](#), [Missouri](#), [Nebraska](#), [Nevada](#), [New York](#), [Oregon](#), [South Carolina](#), [Utah](#), [Virginia](#), [Washington](#), [West Virginia](#).



The League is encouraged that states are increasingly updating their elections processes to meet the needs of our modern, mobile society. However, we must ensure that advancements in our voting systems apply to all eligible voters. Currently, almost every state with online voter registration requires that voters who use the system possess a driver's license or a state-issued ID card with a signature on file. As a result, [millions of eligible voters who lack driver's licenses or state-issued IDs](#) are unable to use the system. For example, young people are much less likely than the general population to have a driver's license - and young people are also much less likely to be registered to vote! What's more, there are [strong economic and racial divides in internet usage and access](#). These circumstances raise concerns about voter discrimination, as those locked out of the current online voter registration systems overwhelmingly tend to include low-income, minority, elderly and disabled individuals.

By the beginning of 2014, 23 states had established or were in the process of establishing online voter registration systems. This means that 100 million, or nearly 50 percent of, all eligible voters in the nation will live in states that provide this easy and convenient way to register to vote. According to [new research by the Pew Charitable Trusts](#), online voter registration provides great benefits for voters and election workers alike. The benefits of online registration are so great, in fact, that the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA) has taken notice. In January 2014, [the PCEA released a report](#) recommending that states adopt online registration

### Why We Need Secure Online Voter Registration

Secure online voter registration is one of [five key election administration reforms](#) that the League believes are critical to making our elections as free, fair and accessible as possible. [Pew's study confirms](#) that online registration:

1. *Saves taxpayer dollars.*
2. *Reduces the amount of paper work and staff time on the part of the state and county governments.*
3. *Increases accuracy of voter rolls by reducing the potential for data errors.*



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- a. A 2009 survey of incomplete and incorrect registrations in Maricopa County, Arizona found that electronic voter registrations are as much as five times less error-prone than their paper-based counterparts.<sup>2</sup>
4. *Increases the number of registrations statewide.*
  - a. DMV voter registrations have nearly doubled in Washington and Kansas, and increased by even more in Rhode Island.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Seven times as many South Dakotans submitted voter registrations at DMVs after the state implemented an automated system.<sup>2</sup>
  - c. Registration rates among 18-24 year-old citizens rose from 28 to 53 percent after Arizona introduced online and automated registration.<sup>2</sup>
5. *Provides registration access to a greater number of eligible voters especially underrepresented populations when the law includes the ability to register online at state public assistance agencies*

Pew found that online voter registration increases voter satisfaction, with polling data showing that 65 percent of registered voters support allowing online voter registration -- likely due to the system's ease and convenience. Online voter registration also decreases the administrative burden caused by the need for officials to re-enter information from handwritten forms and eliminates the risk of transcription errors.

### What Can the League Do?

The League is committed to ensuring that elections are free, fair and accessible, meaning that all eligible voters have equal access to the ballot, including minorities, the elderly, women, low-income individuals, young people and people with disabilities. We believe that online voter registration systems should not be contingent upon an individual's possession of a driver's license or state-issued ID, or ready access to the Internet. It's critical that these systems are designed to be equally available to all eligible voters, and that states work to help mitigate the impact of a system that relies on access to computers and the Internet.

- One way to increase the accessibility of online voter registration is to utilize existing technology to capture and accept an electronic version of the registrant's signature. This option would enable voters both to register online and provide a signature to complete the registration process instantaneously. In addition, the use of mobile devices like tablets and smartphones would not only directly increase voting access, but it would also enable organizations that conduct voter registration drives, [like the League](#), to incorporate mobile devices into their efforts and help mitigate the problem of uneven access to computers and the Internet.
- Online voter registration could also streamline the elections process for government public assistance agencies, which are already required by the [National Voter Registration Act](#) (NVRA) to offer clients who are eligible voters the opportunity to register to vote. Providing online registration at government public assistance agencies allows clients -- who are often low-income individuals or people with



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disabilities, populations that might lack either a current driver's license or stable access to the Internet -- the ability to register to vote both easily and instantaneously.

- Additionally, states should enable eligible voters to attest that the information they enter online is accurate by using a computerized mark, similar to the way in which Internet users can "sign" contracts, credit card invoices, banking and other transactions online. These voters could then be required to provide a "wet" signature or an image of a written signature when they visit a polling place for the first time. This method is similar to the [Help America Vote Act's](#) (HAVA) requirement that first-time voters present identification at the polls if they have not done so when registering by mail.
- Finally, the League recognizes that many individuals have out-of-date voter registration records, often due to recent changes of address or changes in their name, [including from marriage or divorce](#). The League believes that an efficient online registration system must also give individuals the option to update their voter registration record to reflect changes. We are, after all, a very mobile society, and updating addresses online would significantly improve the accuracy of voter registration lists.

The League is encouraged that states across the country are increasingly implementing online registration systems, and that both the Pew study and the PCEA recommendations reinforce the many benefits of online voter registration. We hope that the remaining states will consider updating their registration process to include online opportunities for all and that those with systems in place will update their systems so every eligible voter can benefit equally. Leagues across the country will continue to work to ensure that no eligible citizen is left behind.

### OVR Saves Money: State Examples

1. While there are initial costs when a state establishes an online voter registration system, the overall savings more than make up the difference. In 2013 [the Pew Charitable Trusts](#) surveyed 13 states currently using online voter registration, and 12 of the 13 states surveyed reported that cost cutting is one of the greatest benefits of these systems.
2. In 11 of the 13 states that the Pew Charitable Trusts surveyed, the average upfront cost to build a system for online voter registration was \$240,000. However Kansas reported no expense, and California estimated its cost at \$1.8 million.
3. California's online system launched slightly more than a month before the registration deadline for the 2012 general election. During that short time, nearly 900,000 Californians conducted online registration transactions and the secretary of state's office estimated savings of \$2.34 per online registration—or about \$2 million—compared with the cost of processing paper applications. In addition, state printing and postage costs fell by around \$500,000 due to fewer registration-related mailings. These total savings of \$2.5 million exceed the \$1.8 million cost of implementing the system, and the state expects similar outcomes in 2014.



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4. Arizona has had online voter registration for over a decade in Maricopa County. They reported almost \$1.4 million in savings from online voter registration during the four-year period from 2008 to 2012.<sup>1</sup> Maricopa County automatically reviews and accepts about 90 percent of the electronic transactions it receives, spending an average of 3¢ to process an electronic application (compared to 83¢ per paper form). As the county received 462,904 applications electronically in 2008, this represents savings of over \$370,000. State officials estimate they spend a total of at most \$125,000 annually to operate, enhance, and maintain the online and MVD systems – a cost that is covered by the overall savings of the program.
5. In Arizona, mail-in registrations dropped from 60 to 20% from 2001-02 to 2007-08. Online and mail-in registrations now account for 70 percent of all registrations received between 2007 and 2009.
6. In both Kansas and Washington, local election officials have estimated that they can process electronic registrations in half the time or less than they can process a paper form. As a result, officials in four Washington counties reported in a recent study that they save “anywhere from \$.50 to \$2.00” on each registration they receive electronically - officials processed over 300,000 new online and DMV registrations in 2008. The Washington Secretary of State’s office in turn saved \$126,000 in 2008 due to online and automated DMV registration.
7. Full automation at the DMV has also allowed Delaware to eliminate five vacant positions in its state and county election offices, for an annual savings of \$200,000.

**The voting process should be as easy and accessible as possible, so that all eligible citizens are able to register and cast their ballots.** Secure online voter registration is a crucial, common sense step in modernizing our nation's voting system, and we're committed to making sure it is available to all eligible voters.

### Additional Resources:

- [The Problem with Online Voter Registration](#) by Lloyd Leonard of LWVUS
- [Model online registration bill](#) from Project Vote
- [National Conference of State Legislatures online registration information](#)
- Project Vote’s list of [states with online registration as of April 2014](#)
- [Brennan Center review of online voter registration states](#)
- [Brennan Center report \*Voter Registration in a Digital Age\*, 2010](#)
- [Pew Charitable Trusts report \*Understanding Online Voter Registration\*, 2014](#)