2026 DC General Election

CIVIC AWARENESS GUIDE

Prepared for Community Awareness

In Partnership with Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)

About This Guide

Voices for a Second Chance created this guide because we believe that returning citizens and justice-impacted communities deserve clear, accessible information about the candidates and choices on the ballot. Too often, the people most affected by government decisions are the least informed about who is making them.

This guide covers the November 3, 2026, Washington, D.C. general election. It includes information about ranked choice voting, the issues that matter most to returning citizens, how to vote if you are currently incarcerated, and key election dates.

This guide is for informational and educational purposes only.

What's Inside

- How ranked choice voting works (including technical terms)
- Why your vote matters: elections and policy enforcement
- How to vote if you are currently incarcerated
- What's on the ballot: a community-friendly summary
- Common questions for outreach teams
- Sources and verification

Why This Matters

Every election shapes the systems that affect daily life — public safety, housing, reentry supports, youth programs, economic opportunity, and DC's ability to govern itself. Your vote helps determine the future of these systems and the wellbeing of our communities.

Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)

VSC supports individuals returning home from incarceration and their families through reentry services, advocacy, and community partnerships. This guide reflects VSC's commitment to ensuring that justice-impacted residents have access to the information they need to participate fully in the democratic process.

How This Guide Is Organized

This guide is organized around five issue areas most relevant to VSC's mission and the people we serve. These are the areas where elected officials make decisions that directly affect returning citizens:

- **Public Safety & Justice:** Policing, violence prevention, accountability, alternatives to incarceration, and reentry.
- **Housing & Stability:** Affordable housing, homelessness, and supportive housing.
- **Economic Opportunity:** Jobs, small business support, workforce development, and opportunities for returning citizens.
- **Youth & Families:** Education, youth programs, family supports, and prevention.
- **DC Autonomy & Governance:** Home rule, federal interference, statehood, and the role of the office.

These categories reflect VSC's priorities. What matters most is that community members understand how elected officials shape the policies that affect their lives.

How Ranked Choice Voting Works

DC general elections use ranked choice voting (RCV), approved by voters through Initiative 83 in November 2024, for any race with three or more candidates. Here's what you need to know:

The Basics

- Instead of voting for just one candidate, you can rank up to five candidates in order of preference for each race with three or more candidates, or as many as are in the race if fewer than five.
- Mark your favorite candidate as your 1st choice, your second favorite as your 2nd choice, and so on.
- You do not have to rank all five. You can rank as many or as few candidates as you like. Ranking just one candidate is still a valid vote.
- Races with only two candidates on the ballot (for example, Attorney General or Ward 6 Council this year) are decided by a simple vote-for-one contest. RCV does not apply.

How Votes Are Counted

- All first-choice votes are counted first. If any candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, they win.
- If no candidate reaches 50%, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated.
- If your top choice is eliminated, your vote moves to your next-ranked candidate.
- This process repeats until one candidate earns a majority and is declared the winner.
- The DC Council At-Large race fills two seats at once, so it uses a modified, multi-seat tabulation process rather than the single-winner process described above.

Important Tips

- Ranking additional candidates does not hurt your first choice. Your second choice is only counted if your first choice is eliminated.
- Do not give multiple candidates the same ranking.
- Do not rank the same candidate more than once.
- Do not skip rankings (for example, ranking 1st and 3rd but skipping 2nd).

Ranked choice voting means the winning candidate must earn broad support. It is designed to give voters more choices and more voice in the outcome.

RCV Technical Terms (For Outreach Workers)

Under Initiative 83 (D.C. Act 25-652), the following terms have specific meanings:

- **Inactive Ballot:** A ballot becomes inactive if all of a voter's ranked candidates have been eliminated in counting rounds. The ballot is not thrown out — it simply has no remaining active candidate to transfer to. This is why ranking more candidates gives your ballot more chances to count.

- **Overvote:** If a voter gives the same ranking to more than one candidate, that ranking and all lower rankings are not counted. The ballot counts only for rankings above the overvote.
- **Skipped Ranking:** If a voter skips a ranking, the skipped ranking is ignored and the next valid ranking is counted. However, skipping can increase the risk of an inactive ballot, so voters should rank candidates consecutively.

Source: Initiative 83 (D.C. Act 25-652), D.C. Code § 1-1001.08a. Full text available at dcboe.org/elections/ranked-choice-voting.

Why Your Vote Matters: Elections and Policy Enforcement

Voting is not just about picking a candidate. It is about choosing the people who decide whether the policies that affect your life get enforced. Here are real examples:

- **Housing:** DC has funding set aside for affordable housing for people leaving incarceration. But if the officials overseeing that money don't prioritize it, those dollars can sit unspent or get redirected.
- **Jobs:** DC law requires that certain jobs go to DC residents. But enforcement is inconsistent, and many returning citizens never see those opportunities.
- **Healthcare:** Gaps in healthcare coverage during the transition from incarceration to community can be life-threatening. The Mayor and Council decide how much funding goes to continuity of care.
- **Halfway Houses:** Halfway houses in DC are overcrowded and under-resourced. The officials you elect control the budget and oversight that determine whether conditions improve.
- **Voting Rights:** DC passed the Restore the Vote Act to let incarcerated residents vote. But incarcerated people and returning citizens still need access to election information in order to fully participate.

When elected officials know that returning citizens are paying attention, showing up, and holding them accountable, they are far more likely to follow through.

How to Vote If You Are Currently Incarcerated

DC is one of a small number of jurisdictions where incarcerated residents retain the full right to vote, including people with felony convictions. This is guaranteed by the Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2020 (DC Law 23-277), authored by then-Councilmember Robert White, now the Democratic nominee for Delegate to the U.S. House.

If You Are in the DC Jail (CDF / CTF)

- DC Department of Corrections staff are required to offer voter registration during intake and at multiple points during your stay, and must automatically register eligible residents unless they decline.
- The DC Board of Elections is required to send every registered, eligible voter in DOC custody a ballot, a postage-paid return envelope, and educational materials without you needing to submit an absentee-ballot application first.
- DOC policy also allows eligible residents to vote in person. In past elections, DOC and BOE have operated an in-person polling place inside the jail during early voting and on Election Day, with same-day registration available. As of this guide's publication, specific November 3, 2026 in-jail voting dates and hours had not yet been published. Ask DOC staff or call BOE to confirm before Election Day.
- People housed in Community Correctional Centers (halfway houses) may vote at designated polling locations.
- If you have not received registration or ballot materials, contact DOC staff and request them. You can also ask a trusted visitor or advocate to contact BOE on your behalf.

If You Are in a Federal (BOP) Facility

- BOE is required to endeavor to provide the same registration and ballot materials to DC residents in BOP custody, delivered via legal mail.
- Request a registration form or absentee ballot by writing to: DC Board of Elections, Restore the Vote Division, 1015 Half Street SE, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20003, or by contacting BOE through the Corrlinks system at outreachspecialist@dcboe.org.
- Sign and date your ballot envelope exactly as instructed, and place it in legal mail early enough to be postmarked by Election Day, November 3, 2026.
- If you move between facilities, notify BOE in writing of your new address, and again after release.

Key Dates for Incarcerated Voters

- October 13, 2026: Voter registration deadline (same-day registration available during early voting and on Election Day).
- October 19, 2026: Deadline to request a mail ballot.
- October 26 – November 1, 2026: Early voting, 8:30 AM – 7:00 PM daily.
- November 3, 2026: Election Day, polls open 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM. Mail ballots must be postmarked this day.

- November 13, 2026: Deadline for mailed ballots to be received by BOE.

After release, the only step required to keep voting is updating your registration address with DCBOE. DC is one of just three jurisdictions nationwide (with Maine and Vermont) where a felony conviction never takes away the right to vote. Check or update your registration at dcboe.org.

For questions or help, contact the DC Board of Elections: (202) 727-2525 | Toll-free: 1-866-328-6837 | dcboe.org

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What's on the Ballot?

Every registered DC voter receives the same general election ballot, regardless of party. The table below covers the citywide races that appear on every ballot. Ward Council, Shadow Senator, Shadow Representative, State Board of Education, and ANC races also appear depending on where you live.

Race	What This Office Does	Your Ballot
Mayor	Leads DC government agencies, proposes the budget, oversees police, corrections, housing, and human services.	**Ranked choice voting (3 candidates + 1 write-in)**
Attorney General	DC's chief legal officer. Represents DC in court, enforces consumer and public safety laws, prosecutes juvenile cases.	**Vote for ONE (2 candidates)**
Council Chairman	Presides over the 13-member Council, sets the legislative agenda, casts a citywide vote on all legislation.	**Vote for ONE (2 candidates)**
DC Council At-Large (2 seats)	Represents the entire District. No more than 3 of the 4 at-large seats may be held by one party.	**Ranked choice voting (4–6 candidates, 2 winners)**
Delegate to U.S. House	Represents DC in Congress. Introduces legislation, votes in committee, advocates for statehood and budget autonomy.	**Ranked choice voting (3 candidates + 1 write-in)**

Important Notes for Voters

- You do not need a photo ID to vote in DC.
- Same-day registration is available during early voting (October 26 – November 1) and on Election Day (November 3).
- Every active registered voter is mailed a ballot automatically. You can also vote in person at any vote center.
- Returning citizens can vote, including people on probation, parole, or supervised release. DC never removes voting rights for a criminal conviction.
- DC residents who are currently incarcerated can also vote. See "How to Vote If You Are Currently Incarcerated."
- Early voting runs October 26 – November 1, 8:30 AM – 7:00 PM daily. Election Day is November 3, 7:00 AM – 8:00 PM.

Where to Learn More

- DC Board of Elections: dcboe.org | (202) 727-2525 | Toll-free: 1-866-328-6837
- Candidate information: Visit dcboe.org for a full list of candidates in each race.

Common Questions: A Quick Reference for Outreach

Q: Do I need to be registered with a political party to vote in the general election?
No. Unlike the primary, the general election ballot is the same for every registered voter, regardless of party.

Q: Can I vote if I have a felony conviction?
Yes. DC never removes the right to vote because of a criminal conviction. This includes people who are currently incarcerated, on parole, on probation, or under supervised release.

Q: Can I vote if I am currently in the DC Jail or a federal (BOP) facility?
Yes. See “How to Vote If You Are Currently Incarcerated” earlier in this guide for step-by-step instructions.

Q: Do I need a photo ID to vote?
No. DC does not require photo ID for in-person voting.

Q: What is the deadline to register to vote?
October 13, 2026 for advance registration. Same-day registration is available during early voting (October 26 – November 1) and on Election Day (November 3).

Q: When is Election Day and what are the hours?
Tuesday, November 3, 2026, 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM.

Q: How does ranked choice voting affect my ballot?
In races with three or more candidates, you may rank up to five candidates in order of preference. Races with only two candidates (Attorney General and Ward 6 Council this year) are simple vote-for-one contests.

Q: What if I move or am released from custody close to the election?
Update your registration address with DCBOE as soon as possible, either online at dcboe.org or by mail.

Q: Where can I get help if I have questions about my rights as a returning citizen?
Contact Voices for a Second Chance, or call the DC Board of Elections at (202) 727-2525 or toll-free at 1-866-328-6837.

Sources & Verification

This guide is for informational and educational purposes only. It does not endorse any candidate, campaign, or political party.

Verification Sources

Election information was verified against the following DC Board of Elections documents, current as of September 11, 2026:

- 2026 General Election calendar
- 2026 General Election vote centers and drop boxes list
- DCBOE ranked choice voting overview

Legal Authority

- Initiative 83 / D.C. Act 25-652 and D.C. Code § 1-1001.08a (ranked choice voting)
- D.C. Code § 1-204.01 (at-large Council party-balance rule)
- D.C. Law 23-277, the Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2020
- DC Department of Corrections Program Statement 4020.4B (inmate voting process, effective September 17, 2025)

Additional Sources

Additional facts were drawn from the DC Corrections Information Council, DCBOE official guidance, and public legislative records.

Information reflects what was publicly available as of September 11, 2026.

Your Vote, Your Voice

Every election is a chance to shape the systems that affect your daily life. Whether you are voting for the first time, voting after incarceration, or voting on behalf of your family and community, your voice matters. We encourage you to research candidates further, ask questions, and make the choice that reflects your values and priorities.

DC Board of Elections

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Website: dcboe.org

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This guide is nonpartisan and does not endorse any candidate.

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