



THE 2026 MIDTERMS

YOUR COLLEGE VOTING PRIMER

WHY THE 2026 MIDTERMS MATTER

Midterm elections don't always get the same attention as presidential elections—but the LGBTQ+ community is facing relentless attacks that seek to strip away our rights, dignity, and freedom.

In 2026, voters will decide who represents us in Congress, Governor's offices, state legislatures, on school boards, and other local offices that shape real parts of our daily lives and the issues that matter most—from healthcare access, inclusive schools and economic opportunity to LGBTQ+ rights and the right to vote itself.

HRC Foundation research shows that LGBTQ+ voters are highly engaged and motivated to vote—but many also feel concerned about today's political climate. They fear being confronted, misgendered, or even denied the right to vote because their identification documents don't match their name, gender expression, or appearance. Even so, most LGBTQ+ voters believe their voice matters and intend to turn out in the 2026 midterms.

The upcoming midterm elections are critical for LGBTQ+ rights and the future of our democracy. College students and young voters can make an even bigger impact by using their collective power to push back against hate and division and keep moving toward full equality. Our votes matter now more than ever. When fewer people vote, each vote carries more weight—including yours.

This guide breaks down what you need to know to vote in 2026—clearly and quickly.

WHO CAN VOTE IN 2026?

You can vote in the 2026 midterm elections if you:

- Are **18 years old** by Election Day (November 3, 2026)
- Are a **U.S. citizen**
- Meet your state's residency requirements
- Are registered to vote in the state where you're voting

You can only vote in one place, but if you're a college student, you often get to choose which place that is.

PREPARE TO VOTE: FOLLOW THESE 5 STEPS

STEP 1: DECIDE WHERE YOU'LL VOTE

If you go to school away from home, you can often vote in your home state or college state – but only one. Some things to think about:

- Which races or issues feel most important to you?
- Which option is easier—voting in person or by mail?
- Where do you plan to live after college?

***Good to know:** Registering to vote does not affect your federal financial aid.

STEP 2: REGISTER TO VOTE

Being registered and knowing that your information is correct is one of the most important steps. Every state has different rules and deadlines, so waiting until the last minute can make things stressful or complicated. Register early and check your status so you're set before your state's deadline.

Tip: Try to register by National Voter Registration Day (September 2026) so you're set early.

Already registered? Take a minute to check your status, especially if you have moved, changed your name, or haven't voted in a while

STEP 3: MAKE A PLAN FOR HOW & WHEN YOU WANT TO VOTE

Next, decide how you want to cast your ballot.

1. If you want to vote in person, you can vote early or on Election Day.
2. At the polls, you can request help or accessibility support and ask for a paper ballot.
3. If you plan to vote by mail, request your ballot early, track it if the option is available, and return it to the proper location before the deadline.
 - a. To find those deadlines, click here: <https://www.vote.org/absentee-ballot-deadlines/>

Look at your calendar and make a plan for when you will vote. Save the date and, if voting in person, think through how you will get to the polling location.

STEP 4: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Knowing your rights can help Election Day go smoothly and help you feel prepared if issues come up.

Know your rights:

You have the right to:

- Vote if you are registered and eligible;
- Stay in line, even if the polls close. Don't leave the line if you're already in it;

- Ask for help from a person you trust. You can also ask questions of poll workers if anything is unclear;
- Request a provisional ballot if there is an issue;
- Vote without harassment or intimidation.

Have a plan if something goes wrong.

If you encounter issues like being challenged, intimidated, or turned away, the most important thing is your safety. If you can:

- Stay calm and assert your right to vote
- Ask to speak with a poll supervisor
- Request a provisional ballot if needed. Document what happened if possible.
- Call the Election Protection Hotline for help: English: 866-OUR-VOTE, Spanish: 888-VE-Y-VOTA
- If you feel unsafe, move toward official poll workers or inside the polling place, and call a voter protection hotline. Trust your instincts.

STEP 5: VOTE (AND BRING SOMEONE WITH YOU)

Voting doesn't have to be a solo activity. Encourage your friends and family members to register, vote, and help others. You can:

- Accompany friends, classmates, or community members to the polls
- Volunteer for GOTV efforts to help other voters exercise their rights
- Volunteer as a poll worker

There is too much at stake to sit this moment out. Showing up—together—is how we protect our rights and keep moving toward equality.