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ELECTIONS

New Indiana voter law causing confusion. What you need to know to be able to vote



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Indiana University sophomore Josh Montagne brimmed with excitement when he headed to the polls Tuesday, the first day of voting for the fall election, but he left bitterly disappointed when poll workers turned him away.

Montagne said he went to the election office at 302 S. Walnut St. in the afternoon and brought his CrimsonCard, an IU-issued ID with his name, photo and an expiration date.

However, he said, poll workers told him he would not be able to vote without showing proof of residency.

“It was gut-wrenching,” he said.

Montagne, a political science major, said he looked forward to voting for people on whose campaigns he worked and for Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party candidate for U.S. president.

2024 General Election: What to know about voting in Bloomington, Monroe County

Montagne said he had voted in the primary election in spring without a problem, using his CrimsonCard. He has moved since then, but said he updated his voter registration with his new address.

A glitch and a mistake result in voter being turned away

Monroe County Election Supervisor Kylie Farris said she believes Montagne’s situation

was, at least in part, the result of a computer glitch.

She said the county's electronic poll books are updated via hotspots and should update every two minutes automatically. However, as Tuesday was the first day of voting, she suspects that the polling book failed to sync properly, which prompted Montagne's voter registration record to get flagged.

Farris said she has made the polling book vendor, Know Inc., aware of the issue and has verified that Montagne's entry has been updated.

She also acknowledged poll workers made a mistake when they turned him away.

"It was not handled the correct way," Farris said.

Poll workers should have given Montagne a provisional ballot instead, she said, and local poll workers have been notified to make sure they are aware of the proper protocols.

While Montagne's situation appears to be unique, Farris said poll workers have seen some other voters, especially IU students, running up against a new state law that took effect in July and expanded a previous state residency requirement.

New law expands proof of residency requirement

Angela M. Nussmeyer, co-director of the Indiana Election Division, said the law previously required first-time voters to show proof of residency if they registered to vote via mail and declined to include their driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

The state legislature in the last session expanded that law to also include first-time voters who hand-deliver their voter registration information — but they, too, have to show proof of residency only if they declined to include their their driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

The only thing that changed, Nussmeyer said, is the state now requires first-time voters to prove residency regardless of whether they mailed or hand-delivered their voter registration paperwork.

Most people who register to vote include proof of residency, Nussbaum said, but even if they don't, it does not stop them from being registered. It means only that their voter

registration gets flagged to require proof of residency, which voters can complete with almost anything that has an address on it, from a school transcript to a voter registration mailing.

Farris said as Monroe County has a lot of first-time voters, because of the university, they may have registered to vote for the first time in Indiana this year. That may help explain why Monroe County is seeing more problems than other areas.

“There is no issue with the IU CrimsonCard,” she said.

But, she said, first-time voters may want to bring proof of residency just in case, in the form of a utility bill, lease agreement or the agreement they signed with the university for their dorm.

If voters run into problems, they will be able to cast a provisional ballot, she said, and will be allowed to show their proof of residency later — though if they fail to do so within 10 days after Election Day, the provisional ballots will be invalidated.

“We want everybody’s vote to count,” Farris said.

Montagne said Wednesday afternoon he had already returned to the election office and cast his ballot, using his CrimsonCard — this time without a problem.

“I’m so excited that I was able to vote,” he said.

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