

PURPOSE

This FAQ explains the recent federal allegations involving a revenge-inspired identity theft scheme that involved a falsified voter registration and ballot submission during the 2024 general election, perpetrated in the name of a Malden resident, and explains how Massachusetts registration and voting procedures work. The central purpose of this FAQ is to distinguish the alleged conduct of an individual from the actions of the Malden City Clerk's Office, which administers elections under federal and state law in accordance with Massachusetts state election procedures.

Background: What the Federal Complaint Alleges

On August 19, 2026, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts announced the arrest of Yupeng Sun, 33, of Andover, on federal charges of fraudulent voter registration and fraudulent voting. According to the federal criminal complaint, Sun allegedly utilized personally identifiable information (PII), obtained through a personal relationship with a former Malden roommate, identified only as J.L., to submit an online voter-registration application through the Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth's website on October 10, 2024. The complaint alleges that J.L. was a lawful permanent resident and therefore not eligible to register or vote.

The complaint further alleges that on October 31, 2024, an individual identifying himself as J.L. went to early voting at Malden City Hall, was issued an early-voting ballot, voted, and signed the early voting affidavit envelope in J.L.'s name. The signature on the affidavit matched that from the voter registration. The Massachusetts voter-registration system recorded the ballot as accepted. Federal investigators later alleged that Sun admitted he had registered J.L. and had used J.L.'s name to vote. The complaint also alleges that Sun later submitted anonymous reports to federal immigration authorities accusing J.L. of the very voting conduct Sun is alleged to have committed.

Important: These are allegations contained in a federal criminal complaint. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. The Clerk's Office's role is not to determine criminal culpability; its role is to administer elections in accordance with Massachusetts law and instructions issued by the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Frequently Asked Questions

1 Did someone actually vote in Malden using another person's identity?

According to the federal criminal complaint, yes. Federal investigators allege that on October 31, 2024, an individual went to early voting at Malden City Hall, identified himself as J.L., received an early-voting ballot, voted, and signed the early-ballot envelope using J.L.'s name. The complaint states that the Massachusetts Voter Registration Information System recorded the ballot as accepted. The person charged is alleged to have later admitted to investigators that he used J.L.'s name to vote, which is identify fraud.

2 How did the person get the victim registered to vote in the first place?

The federal complaint states that the fraudulent registration was submitted online through the Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth's voter-registration website, not by the Malden Clerk's Office. The identity fraud was committed by using the victim's name, former Malden address and Massachusetts driver's-license number as identification information on the State's online application form. Massachusetts allows eligible residents to register online. Online registrations are processed through the Commonwealth's Voter Registration Information System (VRIS) and cross referenced through the Registry of Motor Vehicles' database to confirm identity.

3 What does Massachusetts check when someone registers to vote?

Massachusetts voter registration is governed by state law and a statewide voter-registration system. When a person registers, the application is checked against information maintained by government agencies, including identifying information associated with the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles. The registration system is designed to determine whether the information supplied matches existing government records and whether the applicant appears to meet the legal requirements for registration. Local election officials then process registrations in accordance with state requirements. Importantly, these checks can confirm that identifying information is valid and consistent with government records; they cannot necessarily determine whether a person is unlawfully using another individual's genuine identifying information.

4 What is the VRIS Acknowledgement Notice, and why is it important?

After a voter-registration application is reviewed and processed, the local election office sends an acknowledgement notice by mail to the address associated with the registration. The Secretary of the Commonwealth's online voter-registration system tells applicants they will be notified by mail after their application is processed, generally within 2–3 weeks. The notification is a standard state form generated through the Commonwealth's voter-registration system; it is not a special letter created by the Clerk's Office. The notice is an important safeguard because it gives the person associated with the address an opportunity to see that a registration was processed and to contact the election office if the registration was not authorized. The acknowledgement notice does not, by itself, prove that the person who submitted an online application was the same person who later appeared to vote.

State source: Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth, Online Voter Registration and Voter Registration guidance.

5 What happens when a voter arrives for Early or Election Day voting?

Election officials check the voter against the official voting list for the precinct and election. The voter must verbally identify themselves and affirm the information required by Massachusetts law. Massachusetts does not require every voter to present photo identification at every election, but identification can be required for inactive voters and provisional or challenged ballots. If a voter's identity was confirmed through VRIS, cross referenced with the RMV, a first-time voter is not required to show picture identification on election day. These procedures are established by state law and election guidance.

6 Why doesn't Malden require every voter to show a photo ID?

Massachusetts law does not impose a universal photo-ID requirement at the polls. The Secretary of the Commonwealth states that identification may be required in specified circumstances, including when a voter is on the inactive voter list or is casting a provisional or challenged ballot. A first-time voter whose identity could not be verified through VRIS and RMV databases will be required to show picture identification before they are allowed to vote at their first election. Acceptable identification must generally show the voter's name and registered address. The system therefore relies on the official voter list, voter affirmation, election-office procedures, and targeted identification requirements rather than requiring a photo ID from every voter.

7 Did the Malden Clerk's Office create the fraudulent voter registration?

No. The federal complaint expressly alleges that the online registration was submitted through the Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth's website. The alleged fraudulent actor is accused of identify fraud, using another person's personally identifiable information to create the registration. Malden's election officials did not originate that fraudulent application. Once a registration exists in the official Voter Registration Information System and the individual presents themselves as a registered voter, local election officials are required to administer the voting process according to the state rules governing that voter's status.

8 Did Malden follow the procedures required by Massachusetts election law?

Yes. The Malden Clerk's Office's position is that it followed the applicable Massachusetts election procedures in administering the early-voting transaction. The federal complaint does not allege that a Malden election official created the fraudulent registration, altered a voter record, fabricated a ballot, or intentionally disregarded an election rule. Instead, the allegation is that an individual successfully impersonated another person using that person's identifying information and then presented himself as that registered voter. That distinction is important: an individual can commit fraud within a lawful election process without the election office itself acting unlawfully.

9 Does this incident mean the Malden election system or the 2024 election was compromised?

The incident demonstrates why election administration includes multiple layers of verification, recordkeeping and post-election review, but it does not establish that Malden officials acted improperly or that the election system was compromised. With full cooperation from the City Clerk's Office, the federal investigation was able to reconstruct the registration and ballot activity from government records, including the voter-registration record and the early-voting ballot record. The fact that the alleged conduct was ultimately identified and investigated also illustrates the importance of those records and controls.

What should Malden voters take away from this case?

Residents should understand two things at the same time. First, committing identify fraud to register or vote is serious criminal conduct and is not an authorized part of the Massachusetts election process. Second, the existence of an alleged fraudulent act does not mean the City Clerk's Office was responsible for it. Malden's election officials administer all elections with integrity and accuracy using the voter records, procedures, forms, ballot controls and state requirements provided under Massachusetts law. The Clerk's Office will continue to follow those requirements and work with state and law-enforcement partners when credible concerns are identified.

The Bottom Line

The allegation in this case is that an individual deliberately committed identify fraud in a blatant scheme to enact targeted revenge for a personal vendetta and then presented himself at Malden City Hall as that person. The available federal filing does not allege that the Malden Clerk's Office fabricated, altered, or improperly processed the voter's record. Once the fraudulent registration was brought to the attention of the City Clerk, the office cooperated fully with the United States Attorney's Office throughout the investigation. Malden's priority, as always, is to administer fair and accurate elections guided by integrity to cultivate a trusting relationship between the Clerk's Office and the voters of the City of Malden.

Sources & Further Information

- U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts — Chinese National Charged with Voter Fraud in Massachusetts (August 19, 2026).
- U.S. Department of Justice — Federal criminal complaint and affidavit, United States v. Yupeng Sun (filed August 18, 2026).
- Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth — Registering to Vote.
- Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth — Identification Requirements.
- City of Malden — Voting in Malden / City Clerk's Office.

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