

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Automatic Selective Service Registration to Begin in December 2026 for Eligible Young Men

Starting in December 2026, nearly all eligible men ages 18 to 25 will be registered automatically with Selective Service through federal data systems, replacing self-registration but not reinstating a military draft.

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Nearly all eligible young men in the United States and its territories will begin being registered automatically with the Selective Service System by December 2026, ending the long-standing requirement that they sign up themselves within 30 days of turning 18. The change, signed into law in December as part of the fiscal year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, shifts the burden of registration from individuals to the federal government and marks the biggest overhaul of the process in decades.

Under the current system, almost all male U.S. citizens and male immigrants between ages 18 and 25 are required to register on their own, usually online or by mail. Beginning in December 2026, the Selective Service System will handle that process automatically by using information pulled from other federal data sources, including existing government databases. The agency says it must have the automatic system fully implemented by December.

The change affects the same broad group already subject to registration requirements: almost all men 18 through 25. Women are still not required to register under current law. Some men remain exempt, including those on valid nonimmigrant visas. Selective Service also says narrow exemptions still apply in certain cases involving continuous institutionalization or homebound disability status from before age 18 through age 26.

Federal officials have emphasized that the change does not mean a military draft is being reinstated. There is no active draft. Registration simply maintains a database of people who could be called if Congress and the president were ever to authorize conscription during a national emergency. Even then, registration alone would not mean automatic induction into the military.

Supporters of the change say automatic registration is intended to improve compliance, reduce administrative costs and modernize a system that has depended for years on reminders, manual registration and enforcement tied to eligibility for some federal and state benefits. The Selective Service System says the shift will create a more streamlined process as the agency adjusts its workforce and technology to support the new system.