

Guide For Poll Watchers

State of Alaska
DIVISION OF ELECTIONS

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Division of Elections Directory

Alaska Division of Elections Website:

www.elections.alaska.gov

Director of Elections

240 Main Street, Suite 400
PO Box 110017
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0017

Phone: (907) 465-4611
Fax: (907) 465-3203
Toll Free: 1-866-952-8683

Region I Elections Office

9109 Mendenhall Mall Road, Suite 3
PO Box 110018
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0018

Phone: (907) 465-3021
Fax: (907) 465-2289
Toll Free: 1-866-948-8683

Region II Elections Office

Anchorage Office

2525 Gambell Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-2838

Phone: (907) 522-8683
Fax: (907) 522-2341
Toll Free: 1-866-958-8683

Matanuska-Susitna Office

North Fork Professional Building
1700 E Bogard Road, Suite B102
Wasilla, Alaska 99654-6565

Phone: (907) 373-8952
Fax: (907) 373-8953

Region III Elections Office

675 7th Avenue, Suite H3
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-4542

Phone: (907) 451-2835
Fax: (907) 451-2832
Toll Free: 1-866-959-8683

Region IV Elections Office

Sitnasuak Office Building
214 Front Street, Suite 130
PO Box 577
Nome, Alaska 99762-0577

Phone: (907) 443-5285
Fax: (907) 443-2973
Toll Free: 1-866-953-8683

Absentee and Petition Office

By-Mail, Electronic Voting and Petition Programs
2525 Gambell Street, Suite 105
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-2838

Phone: (907) 270-2700
Fax: (907) 270-2780
Toll Free: 1-877-375-6508

Native Language Assistance

Toll Free: 1-866-954-8683

Becoming a Poll Watcher

Introduction

The Division of Elections has developed this handbook to familiarize poll watchers with relevant election laws and to define the responsibilities and limitations of a poll watcher.

The integrity of elections is a concern of all citizens. Although you as a poll watcher may represent a particular candidate, political party, or civic organization, your principal interest is in the conduct of a fair and honest election. This handbook is an overview intended to help you understand your basic responsibilities.

Before assuming your duties as a poll watcher, review this handbook to gain an understanding of the polling place activities. The right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy. It should be the objective of the election officials and poll watchers together to protect this right of the voter.

If you have any questions regarding the election process, please contact the regional election supervisor for your area.

Appointment

One or more persons may be appointed as a poll watcher for each precinct or counting center for any election. Poll watchers must be citizens of the United States. Poll watchers are appointed by:

- The precinct party committee where an organized precinct committee exists
- The district party committee where no organized precinct committee exists
- The state party chair where no precinct or district committee exists
- Candidates
- Organizations or organized groups that sponsor or oppose an initiative, referendum, or recall

Distribution of Poll Watcher Badges

Poll watchers will be required to present written proof showing they are an authorized poll watcher when reporting to a voting location. In addition, while at the voting location, poll watchers must identify that they are a poll watcher by wearing an identification badge with their name.

The poll watcher badge is used as the identification badge. The authorized person writes their name on one side and on the other side writes who they are representing. Once completed, the poll watcher badge serves as the written proof. Poll watcher badges may be obtained from a regional election supervisor prior to Election Day.

Poll Watcher Training

The regional election supervisor shall provide this handbook as the written guideline to conduct poll watcher duties.

Persons authorized to distribute poll watcher badges are responsible for the training of all poll watchers under their authority on the proper conduct of poll watchers according to the provided guidelines and are responsible for the conduct of poll watchers.

Identification of Poll Watchers

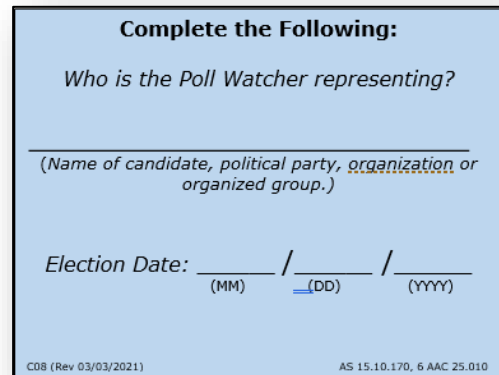
Poll watcher identification badges are available in each of the regional election supervisor’s offices. To be valid, the poll watcher identification badge must indicate:

- The name of the poll watcher, listed on the front of the badge
- The title “poll watcher”, listed on the front of the badge
- The date of the election, listed on the back of the badge
- The name of the party, candidate, or organization the poll watcher is representing

Front of Badge:



Back of Badge:



The name of the party, candidate, or organization the poll watcher is representing listed on the back of the poll watcher identification badge cannot be exhibited to voters as this is electioneering. This side is only to be viewed by the election board when arriving.

Without the proper identification badge, the poll watcher will be asked to leave the polling place.

Persons Authorized in the Polling Place

Election Board Members

In each precinct, an election board is appointed to conduct the election. The board is composed of at least three election officials. Election officials must be citizens of the United States. One of the officials is appointed chairperson and is primarily responsible for the administration of the election in the precinct. In many precincts, a second official is appointed as a co-chairperson and is primarily responsible for the counting system.

All election officials have equal authority. They conduct the election, administer the voting procedures, determine voter qualifications, and maintain the decorum of the polling place. By majority decision, the election officials determine the action required on any questions that arise during the election.

All persons present in the polling place or within 200 feet of any entrance to the polling place must obey the lawful orders of the election board members. **Only election board members may handle election supplies and materials.**

Poll Watchers

There can be only one poll watcher representing each political party, organized group, or candidate in the polling place at a time.

Poll Watchers must have proper identification. **Poll watchers have no duties in the conduct of the election.**

Candidates may serve as poll watchers; however, they must have proper poll watcher credentials to remain in the polling place.

Others

Other persons allowed to remain in the polling place are:

- Voters while voting
- Division of Elections representatives
- Attorney General's Office representatives

Privileges and Conduct of Poll Watchers

Poll Watcher Conduct

Poll watchers shall produce their identification badges upon the request of the election board and shall have their identification badges visible and attached to their person at all times. The election board must ensure that the poll watcher has a complete view of the election process. The poll watcher may not sit in the area behind the election table where election officials are working or in between election officials handling precinct registers and must remain a distance away from the voting machines and voting booths to ensure the privacy of the ballots. The poll watcher may be in close enough proximity to hear and record the name of a person who is voting.

It is important for each poll watcher to realize that election officials are honest, diligent citizens trying to do an important job that requires long hours of hard work. A poll watcher should establish a cooperative relationship with the election board to best facilitate the election process. A negative attitude by the poll watcher may create unnecessary stress.

Only one poll watcher for each party, candidate, or organized group may be present in the polling place at a time.

Poll Watcher Interference

Poll watchers shall not interfere with the election process and may not handle any election supplies or materials, including the precinct registers.

Poll watcher may not campaign or try to persuade voters to vote a certain way inside the polling place or within 200 feet of any entrance.

A poll watcher who creates a public disturbance may be removed from the polling place.

The Poll Watcher's Role

Before the Polls Open

Poll watchers may observe the set-up procedures and check that the ballot box is empty before the polls open. They may closely observe the election officials as official ballots are prepared for distribution.

During Voting Hours

Poll watchers may observe the general conduct of the election throughout the day.

When a voter enters the polling place, an election official will ask for their name and a piece of identification. **The ID requirement may be waived if someone working on the election board personally knows the voter, except when "Must Show ID" is printed in the signature block above the voter's name and, in this case, the voter must present identification.**

If a voter does not have identification and is not personally known by an election official, the voter must vote a questioned ballot.

Before issuing ballots, the election official will ask voters to sign their name on the precinct register. Voters having difficulty in signing their name may make a mark on an "X" in the signature space.

Poll watchers may not closely observe the signatures appearing on the precinct register. However, the poll watcher may sit close enough to hear the election official say the voter's name.

Poll watchers may check the polling booths after each voter leaves the booth to make sure no campaign materials have been left in the booth.

Campaigning

Campaigning is an act that is meant to persuade voters to vote in a particular way. **It is against the law for campaigning to take place within 200 feet of any entrance to a polling place.**

Campaigning includes the following:

- Discussion of an issue or candidate
- Displaying a large campaign sign or vehicle bumper sticker
- Wearing campaign buttons, pins, etc.
- Displaying marked sample ballots or election pamphlets

A voter may bring along, for personal use, notes, and reminders such as a pre-marked sample ballot or an official election pamphlet. A voter may take these items into a polling booth. Materials left behind should be disposed of immediately.

It is the duty of the election board to prohibit campaigning. The election board may not discuss any political party, candidate, or issue while on duty. The election board may not inform a voter or anyone else that a person is a candidate for a specific race.

Poll watchers may not campaign while on duty at a voting location as a poll watcher. Any type of campaigning observed by the poll watcher should be reported immediately to the election board or the regional election supervisor.

After Polls Close

Poll watchers may remain in the polling place until all procedures are completed.

In the precincts where the precinct scanner or voting tablet is used, the poll watcher may request the election board to print an additional copy of the results tape for the poll watcher. For the rank choice general elections, only the first choice will be tabulated by the precinct scanner on election night.

Observing Ballot Counting

In those precincts where hand counting of the ballots is completed, a poll watcher may observe the counting of the ballots. For rank choice general elections, only the first choice will be counted by the election board on election night.

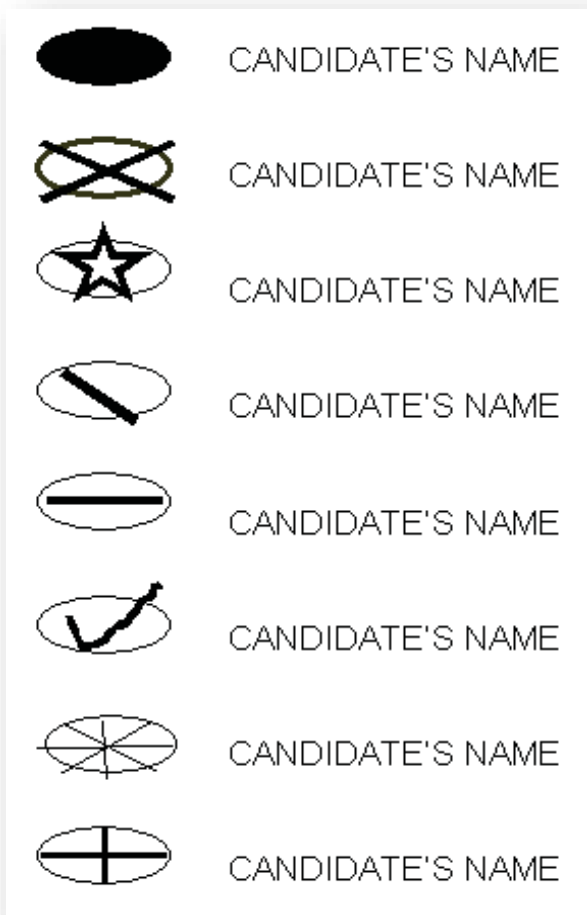
Valid and Invalid Ballot Marking

Only those marks that are **substantially** inside the oval will be counted. The marks must indicate clearly that the voter intended for that particular oval to be designated. **Improper marks invalidate only that section of the ballot in which they appear.**

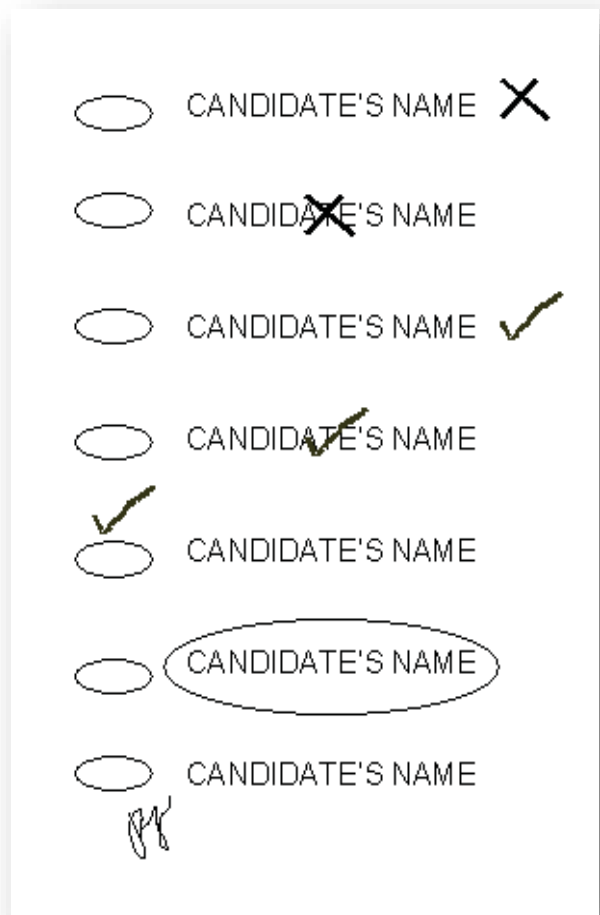
Only the following ballot marks are valid:

- Solid marks
- "X" marks
- Diagonal, horizontal, or vertical marks
- Stars, circles, asterisk, checks, or plus signs

Examples of VALID Marks:



Examples of INVALID Marks



Providing Assistance to Voters

Providing Assistance

Voters who have difficulty because of a disability, who do not speak English, or who cannot read or write, may receive assistance while voting. This help may be provided by the election board, or anyone who is **not** a candidate for office, the voter's employer, agent of the employer, or from the voter's union. (Section 208, Voting Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. 107aa-6)

If a person other than a member of the election board assists the voter, the person must take a verbal oath not to divulge how the voter voted.

The person assisting may accompany the voter into the voting booth.

The person assisting may read the ballot to the voter and may mark the voter's ballot. The person may complete any form for the voter except that the person **cannot sign** forms requiring the voter's signature.

Native Language Assistance

If a voter requests bilingual voting assistance and an election official is proficient in the local native language, the election official may assist in translating the ballot instructions and ballot language to the voter.

If the precinct election officials are not proficient in the local native language, a voter may request language assistance from the native language translator listed on the native language poster as displayed in the polling place.

Voter Instructions

It may be necessary for an election board member to explain to the voter, in full view of everyone in the polling place, how to properly cast a ballot. To the extent possible, instructions to the voter are given by posting informative and pictorial signs in the polling place and in each voting booth.

Any instructions necessary should be given before the voter enters the voting booth.

Questioning Voter Eligibility

Questioning a Person's Right to Vote

A poll watcher may question a person attempting to vote if the poll watcher has good reason to suspect that the person is not qualified under Alaska Statute 15.05.

All questions regarding a person's voting qualifications must be made in writing stating the reason why the person has been questioned.

Reasons for questioning a voter under Alaska Statute 15.05:

- Voter is not a citizen of the United States
- Voter is not 18 years of age or older
- The voter is not a resident of the state and of the house district in which the person seeks to vote at least 30 days before Election Day
- Voter is registered to vote in another state

Poll Watcher's Complaint

When a poll watcher observes a potential irregularity by the election board, the poll watcher should courteously discuss the perceived irregularity with the chair of the election board. If the chair or election board disagrees or fails to correct the potential irregularity, then the poll watcher should contact the regional election supervisor.

Poll watchers should submit their complaint to the regional election supervisor in writing using the Poll Watcher's Complaint Form at the end of this handbook.

Poll Watcher's Complaint Form

Name of Poll Watcher: _____

Representative of:

Party: _____

Candidate: _____

Organized Group: _____

Voting Location: District _____ Precinct _____ Precinct Name _____

Nature of Complaint: _____

Disposition of complaint (if unresolved by election board):

Referred to Regional Election Supervisor

Referred to Director of Elections

Referred to Attorney General's Office

Name(s) of election officials:

Name, address, and phone number of witness (if any):

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Poll Watcher's Signature: _____