

# GUIDE FOR POLL WATCHERS



STATE OF ALASKA  
DIVISION OF ELECTIONS

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## **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 judges 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.

## **BECOMING A POLL WATCHER**

### **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 (Primary election only).
- Candidates not representing a political party (General election only).
- 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 that the person writes his or her name and identifies them as a poll watcher on one side and on the other side, once completed and signed by the authorized person of the organization, serves as the written proof. Poll watcher badges may be obtained from an election supervisor prior to Election Day.

### **Poll Watcher Training**

The 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.\*
- The name of the party, candidate not representing a recognized party or organization the poll watcher is representing.\*
- The signature of the district chair or other authorized person.\*

Front of Badge:



The front of the badge is a rectangular box. At the top, the words "Poll Watcher" are printed in a large, bold, serif font. Below this, there is a horizontal line. Underneath the line, the text "(write name here)" is printed in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font.

Back of Badge:



The back of the badge is a rectangular box. It contains the following text and fields:  
Name of recognized political party or organization or organized group or if a no-party candidate, candidate's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Election Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Precinct/District/State Party Representative or Organization or Organized Group Representative or No-Party Candidate)  
At the bottom left, it says "C08 (Rev 10/16/07)". At the bottom right, it says "AS 15.10.170, 6 AAC 25.010".

\* = This information is listed on the back of the poll watcher identification badge. This 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 judges. Election judges must be citizens of the United States. One of the judges is appointed chairperson and is primarily responsible for the administration of the election in the precinct. In many precincts a second judge is appointed as a co-chairperson and is primarily responsible for the counting system.

All election judges 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 judges 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 not representing a political party 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**

### **Privileges and Conduct of Poll Watchers**

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 members 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 workers are working or in between poll workers 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 workers 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 election board members 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 (during a Primary Election) or 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 watchers 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 judges 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, the election board 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 voters 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 or 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 material has 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 election supervisor.

## **After Polls Close**

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

In precincts where the optical scan or touch screen voting unit is used, the poll watcher may request the election board to print an additional copy of the results tape for the poll watcher.

## Observing Ballot Counting

### Valid Ballot Markings

In those precincts where hand marked ballots are used, a poll watcher may observe the counting of the ballots.

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.
- Diagonal, horizontal or vertical marks.
- "X" marks.
- Stars, circles, asterisks, checks or plus signs.

#### EXAMPLES OF VALID MARKS



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME



CANDIDATE'S NAME

**Invalid Ballot  
Markings**

EXAMPLES OF INVALID MARKS

☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME X

☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME X

☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME ✓

☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME ✓

✓  
☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME

☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME

☐ CANDIDATE'S NAME  
PR

## 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 when 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. 1073aa-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 providing assistance may accompany the voter into the voting booth.

The person providing assistance 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 by 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 an administrative error or irregularity by the election board, the poll watcher should courteously call it to the election board's attention. If the election board fails to correct the error or refuse to follow legal procedures, then the poll watcher should contact the regional election supervisor. Election board members may be removed from the election board for misbehavior or neglect of duty.

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:**

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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 judges:

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Poll Watcher's Signature**

