

# A Guide for Pollwatchers

[10 ILCS 5/7-34, 17-13, 17-14, 17-23, 19-10]



Issued by the  
**STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

## **Introduction**

The Guide for Pollwatchers is designed for pollwatchers and others who want to become more familiar with the basic responsibilities of pollwatchers and the role they play in the election process. It also includes information concerning authorized individuals in the polling place, the differences between voter assistance and instruction, challenging a person's right to vote, illegal Election Day activities, precinct registration, and voting in nursing homes. Although pollwatchers may represent particular candidates, political parties or qualified organization of citizens, their principal interest is in the conduct of a fair and honest election.

The term election authority is used throughout this guide and refers to the county clerk, county board of election commissioners or city board of election commissioners. The county clerk is responsible for conducting the election, except in those jurisdictions where a board of election commissioners exists.

This Guide may be amended to include new legislation and court decisions. Please visit the Illinois State Board of Election's website ([www.elections.il.gov](http://www.elections.il.gov)) for any updates.

## **AUTHORIZED INDIVIDUALS IN THE POLLING PLACE**

### Election Judges

Election judges are officers of the Circuit Court and have legal authority to conduct the election in the polling place. All judges have equal responsibility and authority. In the performance of their duties, election judges administer the voting procedures, determine voter qualifications and maintain the decorum of the polling place. By majority decision, the judges have the sole power to allow or disallow a challenge to a voter, to cause removal of unauthorized pollwatchers and to limit the number of pollwatchers in the polling place. All persons present in the polling place, or within the campaign free zone, must obey a lawful order of the election judges. Only the election judges may handle election supplies and materials.

### Police Officers

In some jurisdictions, local uniformed police officers are assigned to the polling places for the purposes of maintaining order. They have no authority over the conduct of the election except in the case of on-site criminal violations. Police officers function at the discretion of the election judges.

### Pollwatchers

Candidates, political parties, qualified organization of citizens, organized proponents and opponents of a ballot proposition, and State nonpartisan civic organizations may appoint pollwatchers. The pollwatchers' role is established by law. Pollwatchers sometimes referred to as challengers, checkers or simply watchers, are election observers who aid in ensuring the free and fair conduct of elections. Pollwatchers may be in the polling place before the polls open, during the actual voting hours, and after the polls close.

All pollwatchers must be registered to vote in the State of Illinois and must possess valid credentials. Every pollwatcher must surrender his credentials to the judges when he/she enters the polling place. If he/she refuses, or if the credentials are not valid, he/she must leave. All pollwatcher credentials are to remain in the possession of the judges and returned to the election authority after the polls close.

To be valid, pollwatcher credentials must contain the following:

- a. The real or facsimile signature of the appropriate election authority or the Illinois State Board of Elections. The election authority may not require any political party, candidate, the presiding officer of a civic organization or the chairman of the proponent or opponent group to submit the names or other information concerning pollwatchers before making credentials available to such persons or organizations.
- b. The real or facsimile signature of the appointing authority. The appointing authority can be the state or local party chairman, the presiding officer of a qualified organization of citizens, the presiding officer of a State nonpartisan civic organization, the chairman of an opponent or proponent to a proposition, or a candidate, whichever is appropriate.
- c. The signature and address of the pollwatcher and a statement that the pollwatcher is in fact registered to vote from that address.
- d. The name of the county and the precinct or ward in which the pollwatcher is registered.

The number of pollwatchers allowed in the polling place at any one time is limited by law.

<b>NUMBER ALLOWED IN POLLING PLACE AT A GIVEN TIME</b>		
<b>Appointing Authority</b>	<b>Cons. Primary/ General Primary</b>	<b>Cons. Election/ General Election</b>
<b>CANDIDATE</b>	<b>Two</b>	<b>Two</b>
<b>ESTABLISHED OR NEW POLITICAL PARTY</b>	<b>One</b>	<b>Two</b>
<b>*QUALIFIED ORGANIZATION OF CITIZENS</b>	<b>One</b>	<b>One</b>
<b>PROponents AND OPponents OF A BALLOT PROPOSITION</b>	<b>One</b>	<b>One</b>
<b>**STATE NONPARTISAN CIVIC ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>One</b>	<b>One</b>

\* Each organization of citizens within the county or political subdivision, which has among its purposes or interests the investigation or prosecution of election fraud, and which shall have registered its name and address and the name and address of its principal officers with the proper election authority at least 40 days before the election.

\*\* Each State nonpartisan civic organization within the county or political subdivision shall be entitled to appoint one pollwatcher per precinct, provided that no more than 2 pollwatchers appointed by State nonpartisan civic organizations shall be present in a polling place at the same time. Each organization shall have registered the names and addresses of its principal officers with the proper election authority at least 40 days before the election.

### **STATE NONPARTISAN CIVIC ORGANIZATION**

"State nonpartisan civic organization" means any corporation, unincorporated association, or organization that:

- (i) as part of its written articles of incorporation,

bylaws, or charter or by separate written declaration, has among its stated purposes the provision of voter information and education, the protection of individual voters' rights, and the promotion of free and equal elections;

(ii) is organized or primarily conducts its activities within the State of Illinois; and

(iii) continuously maintains an office or business location within the State of Illinois, together with a current listed telephone number (a post office box number without a current listed telephone number is not sufficient).

## **LIMITING THE NUMBER OF POLLWATCHERS**

If the polling place becomes overcrowded with pollwatchers, and the orderly conduct of election is disrupted, a majority of judges may decide to limit the number of pollwatchers by drawing lots. Each established or new political party shall be permitted to have at least one pollwatcher present.

Other individuals allowed to remain in the polling place include the following:

- Voters while voting.
- Minor children accompanying their parent or guardian into the voting booth.
- Representatives of the election authority.
- Representatives of the State Board of Elections.
- Representatives of the office of the State's Attorney and the office of the Attorney General acting in their official capacities.
- Law enforcement officers acting in their official capacities.

**Precinct committeemen** or captains are political party officials and they must have proper pollwatcher credentials in order to remain in the polling place. While they have the same rights and limitations as other pollwatchers, they have no duties whatsoever in the conduct of the election.

**Candidates** must have candidate credentials in order to remain in the polling place. They have the same rights and limitations as other pollwatchers. Only two signatures are required on this form because the candidate is his own "appointing authority".

**Local election officials** (municipal clerks, township clerks, school board secretaries, etc.) also must have valid pollwatcher credentials to remain in the polling place.

## **THE POLLWATCHERS' ROLE**

### *Before the Polls Open*

Before the polls open, pollwatchers may observe the set-up procedures and check that the ballot box is empty. They may observe the judges as they compare the official ballot with the specimen ballot for that precinct.

### *During Voting Hours*

During the day pollwatchers have a right to be near enough to the judges to visually examine the voter's ballot application to compare the signature on the application with that on the signature verification record, and to observe the judge initialing the ballots. They may also watch the ballots being deposited into the ballot box and observe the general conduct of the election.

**Pollwatchers are not allowed to touch any supplies or materials and at no time may pollwatchers be so close to the judges that they interfere with the orderly conduct of the election.**

Pollwatchers shall be permitted to observe all proceedings and view all reasonable requested records relating to the conduct of the election, provided the secrecy of the ballot is not impinged.

### *After the Polls Close*

Pollwatchers **present at the close of the polls** may observe the counting and tallying procedures and remain in the polling place until all procedures are completed. While they may not interfere in any way with such procedures, they may call to the attention of the election judges any violations of election laws.

### Ballot Counting Information Dissemination

Each election authority maintaining a website must provide 24 hour notice on its website of the date, time and location of the analysis, processing, and counting of all ballot forms. Each election authority must notify any political party or pollwatcher of the same information 24 hours before the count begins if such political party or pollwatcher has requested to be notified. Notification may be by electronic mail at the address provided by the requester.

## VOTER INSTRUCTION AND ASSISTANCE

“**Instruction**” means demonstrating to the voter, in full view of everyone in the polling place, how to properly cast a ballot or a write-in vote.

Instruction is given before the voter enters the booth. However, if a voter requests instruction after entering the booth, two judges of opposite parties may instruct the voter in full view of everyone in the polling place. A specimen ballot, not the voter’s official ballot, should be used during the instruction.

“**Assistance**” is the actual marking or casting of votes for the voter by specific individuals in the privacy of the voting booth. Assistance is given only upon the voter’s request and after the voter and the person giving assistance completes the appropriate affidavit. When voting by mail, the individual providing assistance to the voter must complete the appropriate affidavit. He/she must write his/her name and address on the ballot envelope certification statement.

Only two groups of voters may be given assistance: 1) any voter by reason of blindness or physical disability and 2) any voter with an inability to read, write or speak the English language . Before assistance is given, the appropriate square is marked on the voter’s application, and the voter and the person giving assistance must complete the appropriate affidavit.

Anyone giving assistance must cast the vote exactly as directed by the voter and shall not provide anyone with information as to how the vote was cast. Also, any person or persons providing assistance must not attempt to influence the voter.

## **Assisting the Illiterate and Physically Disabled Voter**

Any voter who requires assistance to vote by reason of blindness or disability, or the inability to read or write may be given assistance by a person of the voter's choice, other than the voter's employer or agent of that employer or officer or agent of the voter's union. This information is to be provided to all voters requesting assistance. Should the voter who needs assistance not specify an individual to assist him in voting, he must be assisted by two judges, one from each political party.

In instances where a disabled or elderly voter has received prior approval to vote outside the polling place due to the structural features of the building, pollwatchers may observe the process. In such situations, two election judges, one from each political party, deliver an application to the voter. After it is determined that the voter is qualified to vote, the two judges deliver a ballot to the voter and allow the voter to vote in secrecy. In no case shall such voting take place more than 50 feet from the entrance to the polling place. Pollwatchers shall be permitted to accompany the judges and observe the entire procedure.

## **CHALLENGING A PERSON'S RIGHT TO VOTE**

An election judge, a pollwatcher, or a voter may challenge a person's right to vote.

When a pollwatcher challenges the right of a person to vote, a specific reason for such challenge must be stated. The judges, by majority decision, have the sole power to sustain a challenge (agree with the challenger) or overrule a challenge (disagree with the challenger). Some reasons for challenging include the following:

- a. The voter no longer resides at the address at which he/she is registered.
- b. The person attempting to vote is not the same person registered.
- c. The person attempting to vote has already voted.
- d. The person attempting to vote is not registered to vote.

If a majority of the judges sustain the challenge (agree with the challenger), the voter must be informed of their right to receive a provisional ballot.

If a majority of the judges overrule the challenge, the voter will continue to vote as if no challenge had been made.

### **POSSIBLE ILLEGAL ELECTION DAY ACTIVITIES TO LOOK FOR**

The election judges should be notified and be made aware of any irregular activity in the polling place. If any of the following activities occur, note the individual(s) involved including the time and place of occurrence:

- a. Electioneering – active campaigning and solicitation of votes by a candidate, candidates or party workers in the polling place or within the 100 foot campaign free zone of the polling place.
- b. Voters who try to leave the polling place with a ballot.
- c. Impersonating a registered voter.
- d. Payment for a vote.
- e. Tampering with voting equipment.
- f. Illegal casting of votes.
- g. Interfering with the voting process.
- h. Harassing the election judges.
- i. Harassing the voters.
- j. Illegal voter assistance or instruction.
- k. Disregard of Illinois election laws.

## **PRECINCT REGISTRATION POLLWATCHERS**

If precinct registration is conducted; the election authority must publish a notice indicating the dates, hours and places of the precinct registration.

The election authority issues credentials to precinct registration day pollwatchers in the same manner as in regular elections.

Pollwatchers are allowed to see the names and addresses of the people who have registered during the course of the day.

*Electioneering* – No person is allowed to engage in any electioneering or soliciting of votes or engage in any political discussion at or within 30 feet of any precinct registration.

## **POLLWATCHERS FOR EARLY AND GRACE PERIOD VOTING**

Pollwatchers may be appointed to observe early and grace period voting procedures and view all reasonably requested records relating to the conduct of the election, provided the secrecy of the ballot is not impinged where such voting is conducted. Only one pollwatcher may be appointed for each location where early and grace period voting is conducted. Pollwatchers must be registered to vote in Illinois and possess valid pollwatcher credentials.

## **POLLWATCHERS FOR NURSING HOME VOTING**

Voting may be conducted on the premises of any federally operated veterans' home, hospital or facility located in Illinois or a facility licensed or certified pursuant to the Nursing Home Care Act, the Specialized Mental Health Rehabilitation Act, or the ID/DD Community Care Act. An application for ballot is required and must be made to the election authority no later than 5 days before the election.

Voting may be conducted on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or Monday immediately preceding the regular election (one of these days is designated by the election authority). The voting is supervised by a panel of two election judges, one from each political party. Not less than 30 days prior to the regular election, the election authority arranges with the chief

administrative officer of each facility a mutually convenient day for the conducting of voting on the premises of the facility. The election authority is required to post a notice in a prominent place in his office of the day and time period for conducting voting at each facility.

Pollwatchers are allowed to be present in each facility during voting and until its completion. All precautions should be made to ensure the secrecy of the ballot during this voting process.

Pollwatcher credentials are the same as those issued for Election Day.

### **EARLY AND GRACE PERIOD *BALLOT PROCESSING*** **POLLWATCHERS**

All early and grace period ballots shall be counted in the central ballot counting location of the election authority after 7:00 p.m. on the day of the election. Each political party, candidate, qualified civic organization, State nonpartisan civic organization, and organized proponents and opponents of a ballot proposition shall be entitled to have present one pollwatcher for each panel of election judges therein assigned. They shall be permitted to observe the election judges making the signature comparison between that which is on the ballot envelope and that which is on the permanent voter registration record, and view all reasonably requested records relating to the conduct of the election, provided the secrecy of the ballot is not impinged where such ballots are processed.

### **OTHER POLLWATCHERS**

- Pollwatchers are allowed to observe voting procedures in the office of the election authority and municipal, township and road district clerks.
- Pollwatchers are allowed to observe the verification of the registration status of provisional voters during the 2 week period following an election and may be present when the election authority makes the decision of whether or not to count such provisional voter's ballot.
- Pollwatchers are allowed to observe the provisional ballot remaking process for ballots cast in an incorrect precinct.
- Pollwatchers are allowed to observe early and grace period voting at each permanent and temporary polling place where these types of voting are conducted.

- Where ballots are counted in the office of the election authority, each political party, candidate, qualified organization of citizens, and State nonpartisan civic organization and proponent/opponent groups for referenda shall be entitled to have one pollwatcher for each panel of election judges.
- Pollwatchers are allowed to observe the lottery procedures for all party placement and simultaneous candidate filings for the same office.
- Pollwatchers are allowed to observe the review of contested vote by mail ballots by a panel(s) of election judges.
- A reasonable number of pollwatchers shall be admitted to the counting location to observe the tabulating process.

## **CONCLUSION**

The right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy. It is the duty of all election judges and pollwatchers collectively to protect this voting right.

When a pollwatcher observes an administrative error or irregularity by the judges, he should courteously call it to their attention. If the judges fail to correct the error or refuse to follow legal procedures, then the pollwatcher should record his observations and contact the election authority. Judges may be removed from office for misbehavior or neglect of duty, and may also be cited for contempt of court.

*A pollwatcher should establish a cooperative relationship with the judges.* Pollwatchers should be aware of possible election irregularities and the various methods of vote fraud to enable them to distinguish such activity from proper voting procedures. It is important that pollwatchers become familiar with the procedures outlined in the manuals of instruction for election judges published by the State Board of Elections. Following the procedures in the manuals, the election judges along with the pollwatchers and the election authorities can ensure that elections are administered fairly and that the rights of voters are protected.

## POLLWATCHER CREDENTIALS

TO THE JUDGES OF ELECTION:

Pollwatcher Information	
Name	
Street Address	
County of Residence	
Township or Municipality of Residence	

Authorized to act as a pollwatcher in:	
Name of Precinct	
Ward (if applicable)	
Township or Municipality	
Election	
Date of Election	

In accordance with the provisions of the Election Code, the undersigned hereby appoints the individual listed above to act as a pollwatcher in the precinct and at the election also listed above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Election Authority

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Appointing Authority

\_\_\_\_\_  
TITLE: (County Clerk, Executive Director)

\_\_\_\_\_  
TITLE: (party official, candidate, civic organization president, proponent or opponent group chairman)

Under penalties of law pursuant to 10 ILCS 5/29-10, the undersigned pollwatcher certifies that he or she resides and is duly registered to vote at:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Township or Municipality

\_\_\_\_\_  
County

**Illinois**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State

\_\_\_\_\_  
Precinct and/or Ward in which Pollwatcher resides

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Pollwatcher

### CANDIDATE CREDENTIALS

TO THE JUDGES OF ELECTION:

Pollwatcher Information	
Name of Candidate	
Name of Office	

Authorized to seek admittance to:	
Name of Precinct	
Ward (if applicable)	
Township or Municipality	
Election	
Date of Election	

In accordance with the provisions of the Election Code, the undersigned hereby seeks admittance to above polling location and stated election.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Signature of Candidate)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Office for which candidate seeks nomination or election)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Signature of Election Authority)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 TITLE: (County Clerk, Executive Director)

# STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Steve Sandvoss  
Executive Director

2329 South MacArthur Blvd.  
P.O. Box 4187  
Springfield, Illinois 62704  
Phone: 217/782-4141  
TDD: 217/782-1518

James R. Thompson Center  
100 W. Randolph, Ste.14-  
100  
Chicago, Illinois 60601  
Phone: 312/814-6440  
TDD: 312/814-6431

[www.elections.il.gov](http://www.elections.il.gov)