

Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division



Poll Watcher Training Manual



The Elections Division of the Secretary of State's Office organizes and oversees all election activity, including voter registration, municipal, state, county, and federal elections. They are responsible for certification of election results as well as certifying the qualification of candidates and preparation of ballots and election forms and materials. The Elections Division provides Great Seal certification for authentication of public documents for foreign use for non-Hague countries. Along with those duties, the Elections Division maintains the Statewide Voter Registration Database to ensure that voter registration lists are current statewide.



Definition

A poll watcher is a person designated by an independent candidate, nonpartisan candidate, a political party, or political body to observe at a polling place on election day or during advance voting. Poll Watchers may be permitted behind the enclosed space for the purpose of observing the conduct of the election and the counting and recording of votes. Candidates listed on the ballot are ineligible to serve as a poll watcher in such primary, election, or runoff.

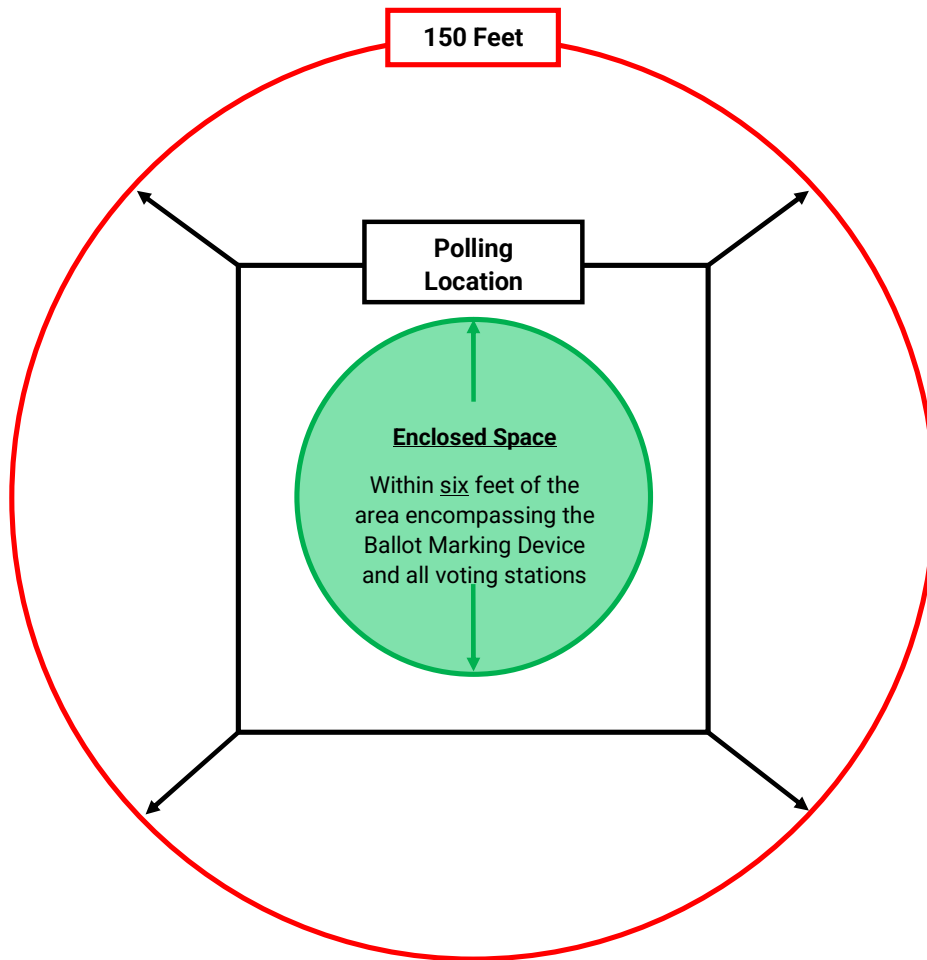
No person shall be appointed or be eligible to serve as a poll watcher in any primary or election in which such person is a candidate. Poll watcher training must be provided by the political party, political body, or candidate designating the poll watcher.

O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408

Poll Watcher Conduct & Prohibitions

- Poll watchers must complete training provided by the political party, political body, or candidate designating them.
 - Upon request, the Secretary of State shall make available material to each political party, political body, or candidate that can be utilized in such training but it shall be the responsibility of the political party, political body, or candidate designating the poll watcher to instruct poll watchers in their duties and in applicable laws and rules and regulations.
- Each political party, political body, or candidate shall, in their written designation of poll watchers, certify under oath that the named poll watchers have completed the required training.
- Poll watchers are official observers only whose primary concern is the integrity and fairness of the election.
 - They may observe the conduct of the election before, during and after the polls close.
 - A designated/credentialed poll watcher may be permitted behind the enclosed space for the purpose of observing the conduct of the election and the counting and recording of votes.
- All poll watchers must be approved and listed.
 - Poll watchers must wear their name badge at all times and bring their designation letter.
 - A poll watcher should show their letter designating him or her a poll watcher to the poll manager of the precinct when entering the polling location.
- The Election Superintendent and the poll officers are the sole authority in the polling place. No other person may handle or touch election supplies and materials.
 - A poll watcher shall not interfere with or impede the conduct of any election, and the poll manager may make reasonable regulations to avoid such interference.
 - If a poll watcher persists in interfering with the conduct of the election or in violating any of the provisions of O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408(d) after being duly warned by the poll manager or superintendent, he or she may be removed by such official.
- Any infraction or irregularities observed by poll watchers shall be reported directly to the superintendent, not to the poll manager. O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408(d)
- Poll Watchers are prohibited from:
 - Talking to voters
 - Checking electors lists
 - Using photographic or other electronic monitoring or recording devices
 - Using cellular telephones
 - Wearing anything advertising a candidacy or advocating for or against an issue.
 - Electioneering or any kind of campaigning in the polling place or within 150 feet of the entrance of the polling place during voting hours. O.C.G.A. § 21-2-414(a)

Who is Allowed Where at the Poll?



Allowed in the Enclosed Space

1. Poll Officials
2. Voters
3. Person legally assisting a voter
4. Members of the Board of Elections and Elections Office Staff
5. Technicians authorized by the Board of Elections
6. **Authorized Poll Watchers**
7. Persons authorized by the Secretary of State's Office or the State Elections Board
8. Peace Officers
9. Children under the age of 18 who are in the care of an adult so long as they do not cause a disturbance or in any manner handle the Ballot Marking Device or the Voter Access Card

Outside the Polling Location, but within 150 Feet

1. Special Interest Groups that are not campaigning (i.e., Voter Assistance Groups)
2. If a voter allows a member of a Voter Assistance Group to assist them with the voting process, they may accompany the voter within the enclosed space
3. Exit Polling: May be conducted inside of the 150-foot boundary so long as the pollster is at least 25 feet away from the polling location

Beyond 150 Feet

1. Campaigners
2. Includes but is not limited to any of the following in support or against a particular candidate, group, party, or question that is to be voted on in this election:
 - a. Wearing of clothing/hats
 - b. Buttons
 - c. Stickers/bumper stickers
 - d. Posters
 - e. Pamphlets
3. Campaigners must also be at least 25 feet away from anyone in line waiting to vote

Statewide Poll Watchers

- Each **Political Party or Political Body**, which body is registered and has nominated a candidate for statewide office may designate, at least 14 days prior to election or runoff, **no more than 25 statewide poll watchers**.
- Each **Independent** candidate may designate **no more than 25 statewide poll watchers**.
- Each **Nonpartisan** candidate running in a statewide election may designate **no more than 25 statewide poll watchers**.
- No more than 2 statewide poll watchers of a political party or body, of an independent candidate, or of a nonpartisan candidate shall be in the same polling place simultaneously.
- Each state-wide poll watcher shall be given a letter signed by the chairperson of the State Election Board. The letter must include:
 - Name of official statewide poll watcher
 - Address of the poll watcher
 - A statement that such poll watcher is a statewide poll watcher.
 - Name and date of election or runoff
- At least three days prior to the primary, a copy of the letter must be delivered to the superintendent of each county in which the poll watcher might serve.
- Same rules for advance voting in an election or runoff.

O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408

Different Laws for Different Elections

- **Primary**
 - **Candidate** may submit **1** name **per** precinct in which his or her name appears on the ballot to the Party Executive Committee 21 days prior to the primary.
 - **The Appropriate Party Executive Committee** shall designate, at least 7 days prior to the primary, **no more than 2 poll watchers for each precinct**.
 - At least three days prior to the primary, the Party Executive Committee shall deliver an official poll watcher letter to the elections superintendent of the county or municipality in which the poll watcher is to serve. The letter should include:
 - Name of official poll watcher
 - Address of the poll watcher
 - The precinct in which he or she shall serve.
 - Name and date of primary
 - Same rules for advance voting in a primary apply.

O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408(a)(1)

- **Primary Runoff**

- **Candidate** may submit **1** name **per** precinct in which his or her name appears on the ballot to the Party Executive Committee 14 days prior to the primary runoff.
- **Party Executive Committee** shall designate, at least 7 days prior to the primary runoff, **no more than 2 poll watchers for each precinct**.
- At least three days prior to the primary, the Party Executive Committee shall deliver an official poll watcher letter to the elections superintendent of the county or municipality in which the poll watcher is to serve. The letter should include:
 - Name of official poll watcher

- Address of the poll watcher
- The precinct in which he or she shall serve.
- Name and date of primary
- Same rules for advance voting in a primary runoff apply.

O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408(a)(2)

• **General Election or General Runoff**

- Each **Political Party or Political Body** may designate, at least 7 days prior to the election or runoff, **no more than 2 poll watchers in each precinct.**
- Each **Independent** candidate may designate **1** poll watcher in each precinct.
- Candidates in a **Nonpartisan** election may designate **1** poll watcher in each precinct.
- At least three days prior to the primary, the Party Executive Committee, Independent candidate, or Nonpartisan candidate shall deliver an official poll watcher letter to the elections superintendent of the county or municipality in which the poll watcher is to serve. The letter must include:
 - Name of official poll watcher
 - Address of the poll watcher
 - The precinct in which he or she shall serve.
 - Name and date of election or runoff
- Same rules for advance voting in a general election or general runoff.

O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408(b)(1)

Observers for Early Processing and Tabulation

In counties or municipalities using voting systems or optical scanning voting systems, Poll Watchers can serve in the locations designated by the superintendent within the tabulating center. Designated locations shall include the check-in area, the computer room, the duplication area, and such other areas as the superintendent may deem necessary to the assurance of fair and honest procedures in the tabulating center.

- Each **Political Party** may appoint **2** poll watchers in each primary or election.
- Each **Political Body** may appoint **2** poll watchers in each election.
- Each **Independent** may appoint **1** poll watcher in each election.
- Each **Nonpartisan** may appoint **1** poll watcher in each nonpartisan election.

O.C.G.A. § 21-2-408 (c)