



Pollwatcher Guide 2026 General Election



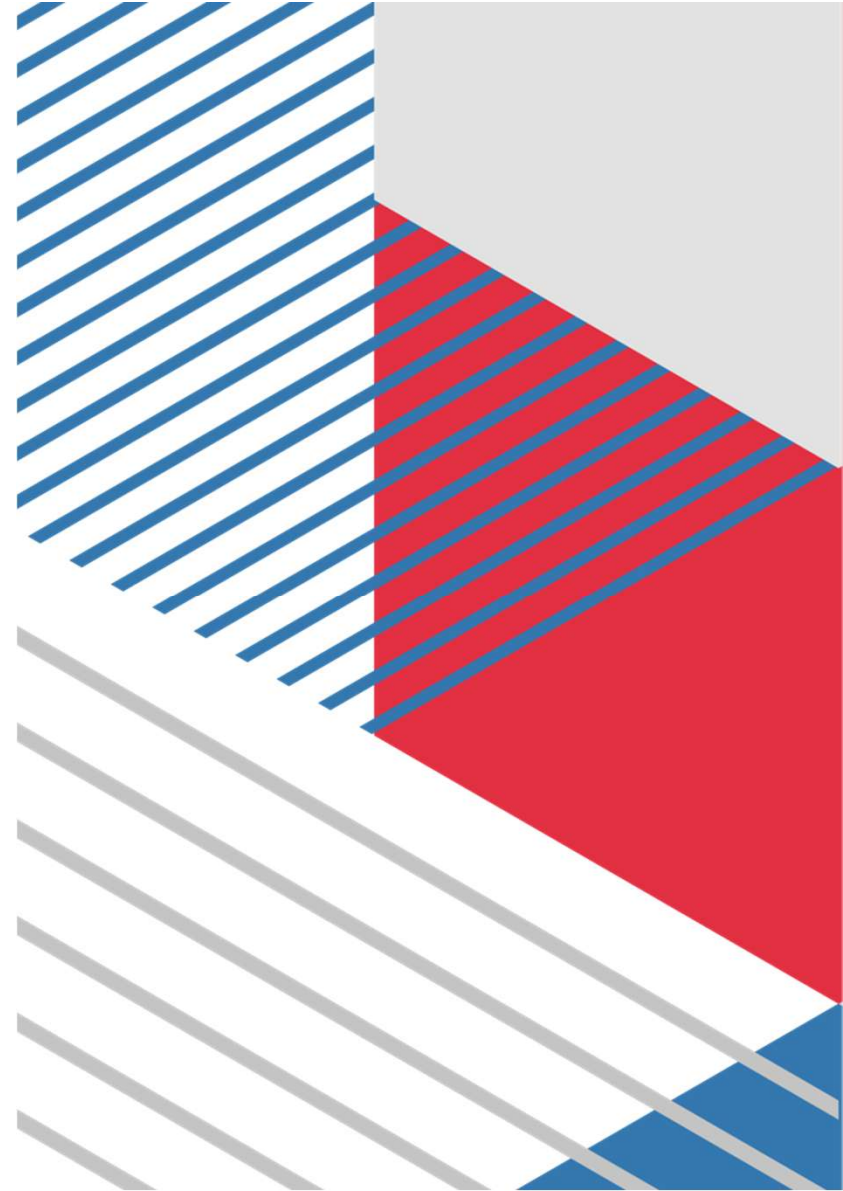
What are poll watchers?

Poll watchers are individuals designated to **observe** the election process at polling places before, during and after voting on Election Day.

They aid in ensuring the free and fair conduct of elections.

With proper credentials, poll watchers may also be present during other election events:

- early and nursing home voting
- vote-by-mail and provisional ballot processing.





Qualifications

Poll Watchers:

- Must be registered to vote in Illinois.
- Must be poll watching with either a political party or an approved organization.
- Must have proper credentials which are issued by the McHenry County Clerk and authorized by one of the following:
 - The state or local party;
 - A candidate;
 - The presiding officer of a civic organization, like the League of Women Voters; or
 - The chairperson of the proponent or opponent group of a public question.

Credentials

Both the credentials and a sample credential will be found on the DPMC website at www.mchenrydems.org/poll_workers.

- Poll watchers must present their credentials immediately when they first enter the voting site. The credentials are valid all day.
- If there are multiple precincts at one polling place, the poll observer needs separate credentials for each precinct.
- All credentials remain in the possession of the election judges and are returned to the County Clerk's office after the polls close.

10 ILCS 5/7-34, 17-23, 29-10

Suggested
Revised July 2019
SBE No. M-2

POLLWATCHER CREDENTIALS

TO THE JUDGES OF ELECTION:

Pollwatcher Information		Authorized to act as a pollwatcher in:	
Name		Name of Precinct or Polling Place	
Street Address		Ward (if applicable)	
County of Residence		Township or Municipality	
Township or Municipality of Residence		Election	General Election
		Date of Election	November 3, 2026

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

McHenry County Clerk
TITLE: (County Clerk, Executive Director)

Chair, Democratic Party of McHenry County
TITLE: (party official, candidate, civic organization president, proponent or opponent group chair)

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
Precinct and/or Ward in which Pollwatcher resides	State
	Signature of Pollwatcher

EACH POLLWATCHER MUST PRESENT COMPLETED CREDENTIALS TO ELECTION JUDGES UPON ENTERING THE POLLING SITE.

McHenry County Clerk's office, 667 Ware Rd, Woodstock, IL 60098
Website: www.mchenrycountyclerk.il.gov Phone: 815-334-4242

Credentials

Both the credentials and a sample credential can be found on the DPMC website at www.mchenrydems.org/poll_workers.

- Fill out the Poll Watcher Information area at the top left and at the bottom left of the form.
- Leave the top right half of the form blank! Do not sign the form.
- Make several copies of the partially filled out form.
- Fill in the "Authorized to act as a poll watcher in:" depending on the precinct you are observing.
- **Sign the form in front of the election judge before you turn in your credentials. It must be an original signature.**

10 ILCS 5/7-34, 17-23, 29-10

Suggested
Revised July 20

POLLWATCHER CREDENTIALS

**FILL IN FOR THE POLLING PLACE
YOU ARE VISITING-
MAY BE DIFFERENT THAN
WHERE YOU ARE REGISTERED!**

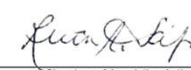
TO THE JUDGES OF ELECTION:

Pollwatcher Information		Authorized to act as a poll watcher in:	
Name	Polly Pollwatcher	Name of Precinct or Polling Place	Nunda 25
Street Address	1126 Elm Street	Ward (if applicable)	
County of Residence	McHenry	Township or Municipality	Oakwood Hills
Township or Municipality of Residence	Crystal Lake	Election	General Election
		Date of Election	November 3, 2026

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

McHenry County Clerk
TITLE: (County Clerk, Executive Director)

Chair, Democratic Party of McHenry County
TITLE: (party official, candidate, civic organization president, proponent or opponent group chair)

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:

1126 Elm St, Crystal Lake IL 60050
Address

Crystal Lake
Township or Municipality

McHenry
County

Illinois
State

Algonquin 10
Precinct and/or Ward in which Pollwatcher resides


Signature of Pollwatcher

YOUR OWN PRECINCT!

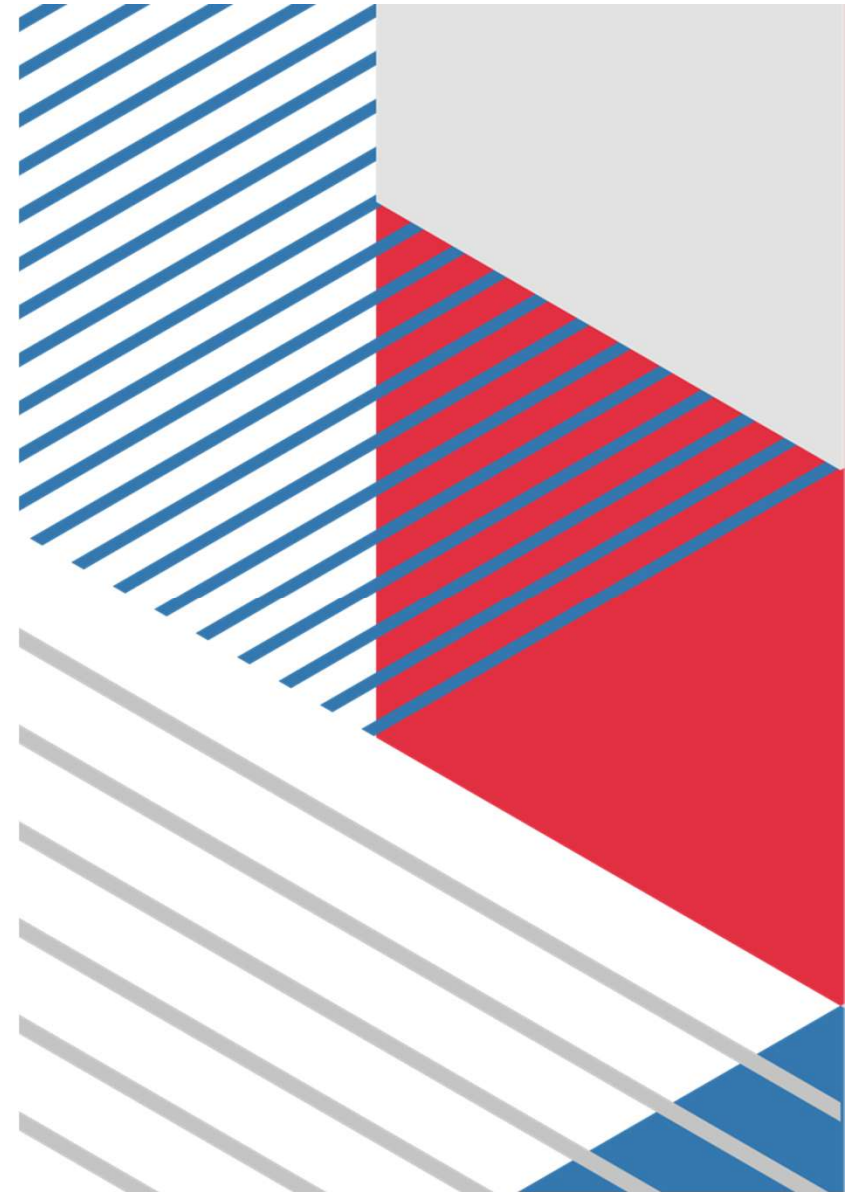
EACH POLLWATCHER MUST PRESENT COMPLETED CREDENTIALS TO ELECTION JUDGES
UPON ENTERING THE POLLING SITE.

McHenry County Clerk's office, 667 Ware Rd, Woodstock, IL 60098
Website: www.mchenrycountyclerk.il.gov Phone: 815-334-4242

How many poll watchers are allowed?

Appointing Authority	Primary Election	General Election Day	Early Voting Sites
Candidate	Two	Two	One
Established or New Political Party	One	Two	One
Qualified Organization of Citizens	One	One	One
Proponents & Opponents of a Ballot Proposition	One	One	One
State Nonpartisan Civic Organization	One	One	One

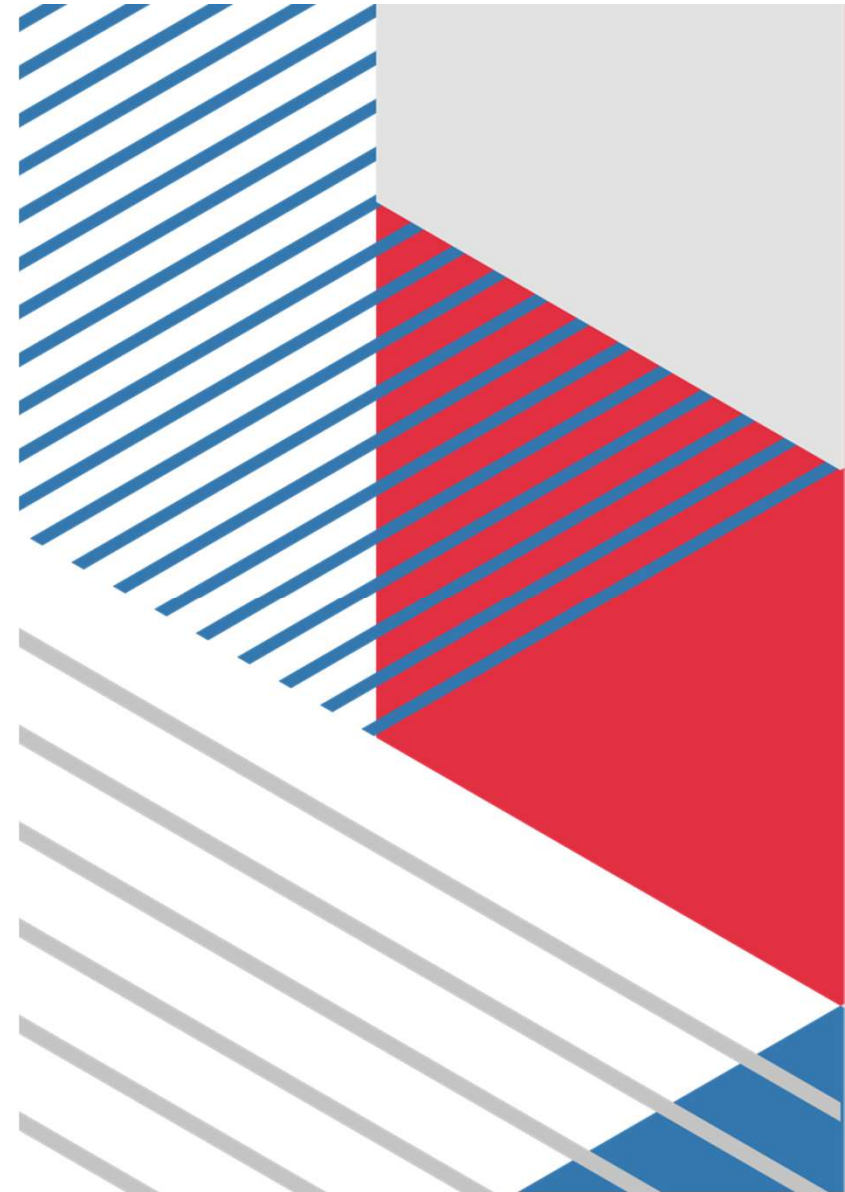
Election judges have legal authority over the conduct of elections. They may remove disruptive or unauthorized pollwatchers or may limit the total number of pollwatchers if the polling location becomes overcrowded and disorderly.



How many poll watchers are allowed?

Appointing Authority	Primary Election	General Election Day	Early Voting Sites
Candidate	Two	Two	One
Established or New Political Party	One	Two	One
Qualified Organization of Citizens	One	One	One
Proponents & Opponents of a Ballot Proposition	One	One	One
State Nonpartisan Civic Organization	One	One	One

Election judges have legal authority over the conduct of elections. They may remove disruptive or unauthorized pollwatchers or may limit the total number of pollwatchers if the polling location becomes overcrowded and disorderly.





Authorized Individuals in the Polling Place

- Voters
- Minor children who are with their parent or guardian while voting
- Representatives of the Clerk's office
- Representatives of the State Board of Elections
- Representatives of the State's Attorney and Attorney General
- Law enforcement officers acting in their OFFICIAL CAPACITY; this might mean Department of Justice Observers,
- Authorized pollwatchers – like you!



Election Day Checklist

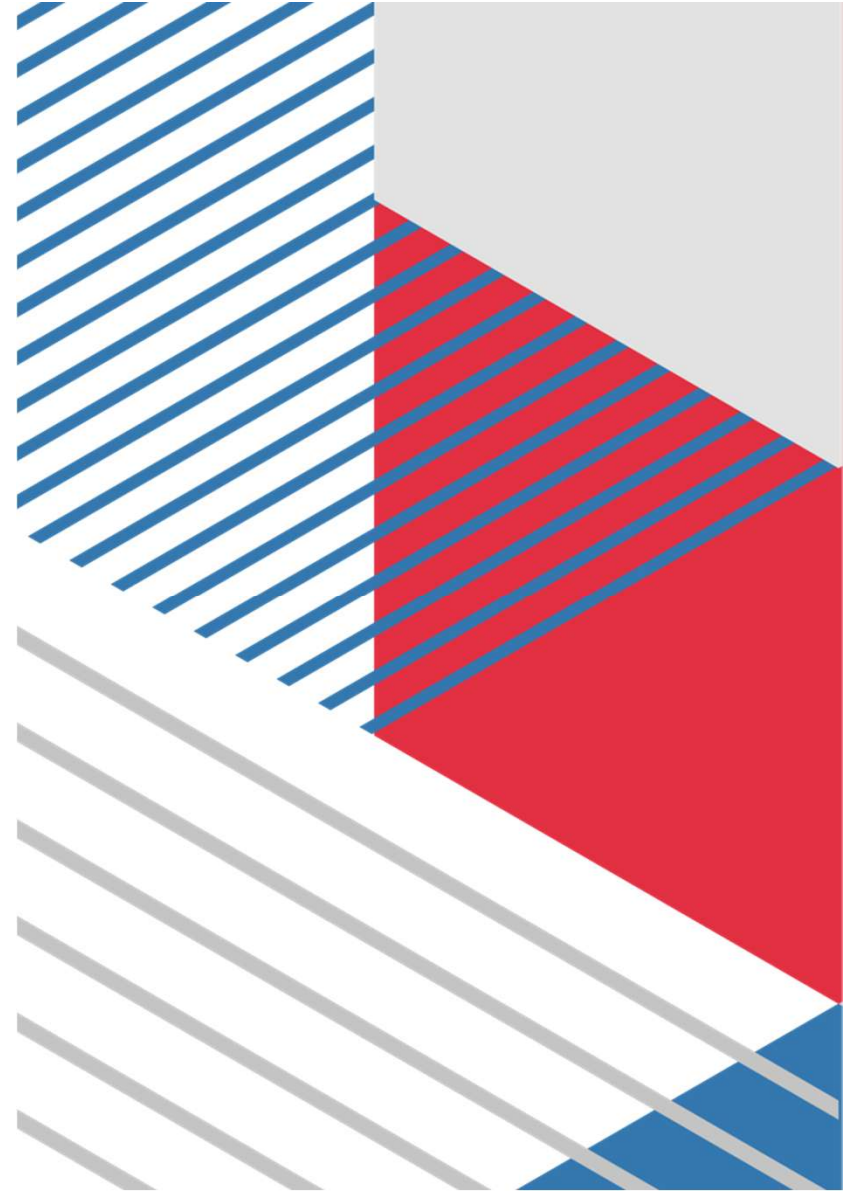


What to bring?

- A state identification
- Pen, paper, clipboard
- Multiple copies of your credentials
- Multiple copies of the Poll Worker Incident Report
- List of voting locations, with addresses
- Poll Watcher Quick Links & Contact Information
- Cell phone charger
- Water / Lunch, Snacks

What to wear?

- Dress comfortably but respectably; formal business dress is not necessary and sometimes more formal clothing is intimidating to voters.
- Make sure to remove any campaign buttons or anything that would be viewed as electioneering from your jackets, bags, hats, etc.



Election Day

Polls open at 6 a.m.

You should be at the polling place before it opens.

**Election judges should be on-site at the polling
location by 5:15 a.m.**



Before the Polls Open

Prior to the polls opening, poll watchers may:

- Observe as the equipment is checked
- Inspect the voting machines (e.g. to ensure that there are no completed ballots in the machine at the beginning of the day)
- View-- but not handle-- the election materials and forms.
- Make sure that the voting machines reflect 0 votes before the polls open and that there are no filled out paper ballots.
- Check outside and access; is signage and markers in place?

Once Voting Begins

During voting hours, poll observers may

- Stand or sit close enough to observe all proceedings, but they may not be within 5 feet of the touchscreen unit while voters are voting or in a position where they can see the vote being cast
- Hear election officials converse with a voter, except during assisted voting
- View the signature clip of the voter
- Write down the name and address information of the voter
- Inspect the voting equipment when not in use by voters
- Bring concerns or questions to the attention of the election officials.



Once Voting Begins

During voting hours, poll observers may

- Inspect vacant voting stations to ensure the unit has not been tampered with or damaged, or anything is left behind
- Challenge the qualifications or identity of a person appearing to vote (This is rare - Democrats generally do not do this.)

The purpose of voter protection is to ensure that eligible voters are allowed to vote freely; it is not to challenge voters. However, if you believe a voter is committing fraud or voting illegally, you may challenge the voter.

Tell the election judge you want to challenge the voter and then call the hotline for further assistance.





Once Voting Begins

Poll watchers may not:

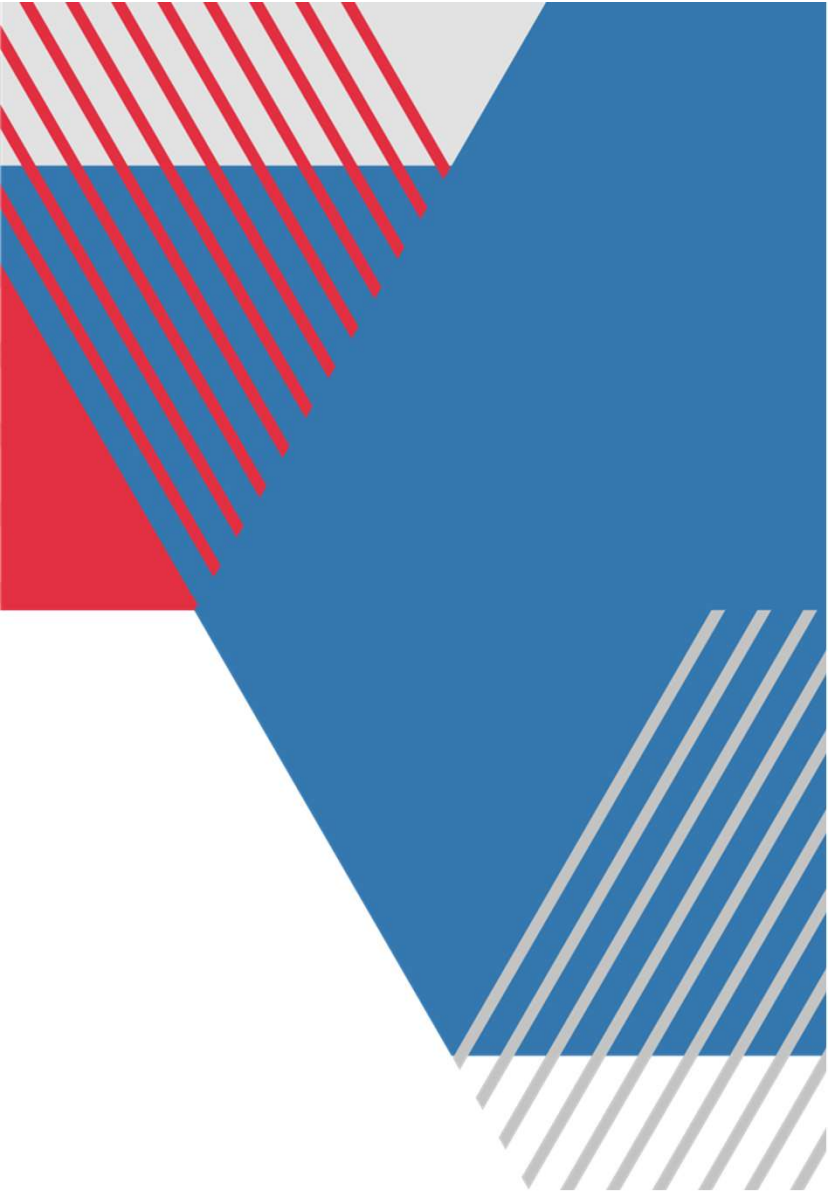
- Disrupt any of the election activities and procedures
- Address the voter directly in the voting place unless first addressed by the voter with a question
 - **Always talk to the judges!**
 - If necessary to speak to a voter (such as to follow up on a provisional ballot) you should follow the voter outside the polling place.
- Handle the election materials and forms
- Film or photograph any voter in the process of voting
- Use their cell phones in the voting area
 - Keep you cell on vibrate and leave the voting area to make calls.



Once Voting Begins

Giving Instruction

- Instruction means **demonstrating to the voter how to properly mark the ballot sheet**. This should occur before the voter enters the booth and in view of the entire polling place.
- The judges giving instruction are to alternate between political parties.
- Election authorities are required to provide registration and voting aids to voters with disabilities and elderly voters including large font sample ballots and magnifying glasses upon request.
- A demonstrator ballot, not the voter's official ballot, must be used during instruction.



Once Voting Begins

Giving assistance

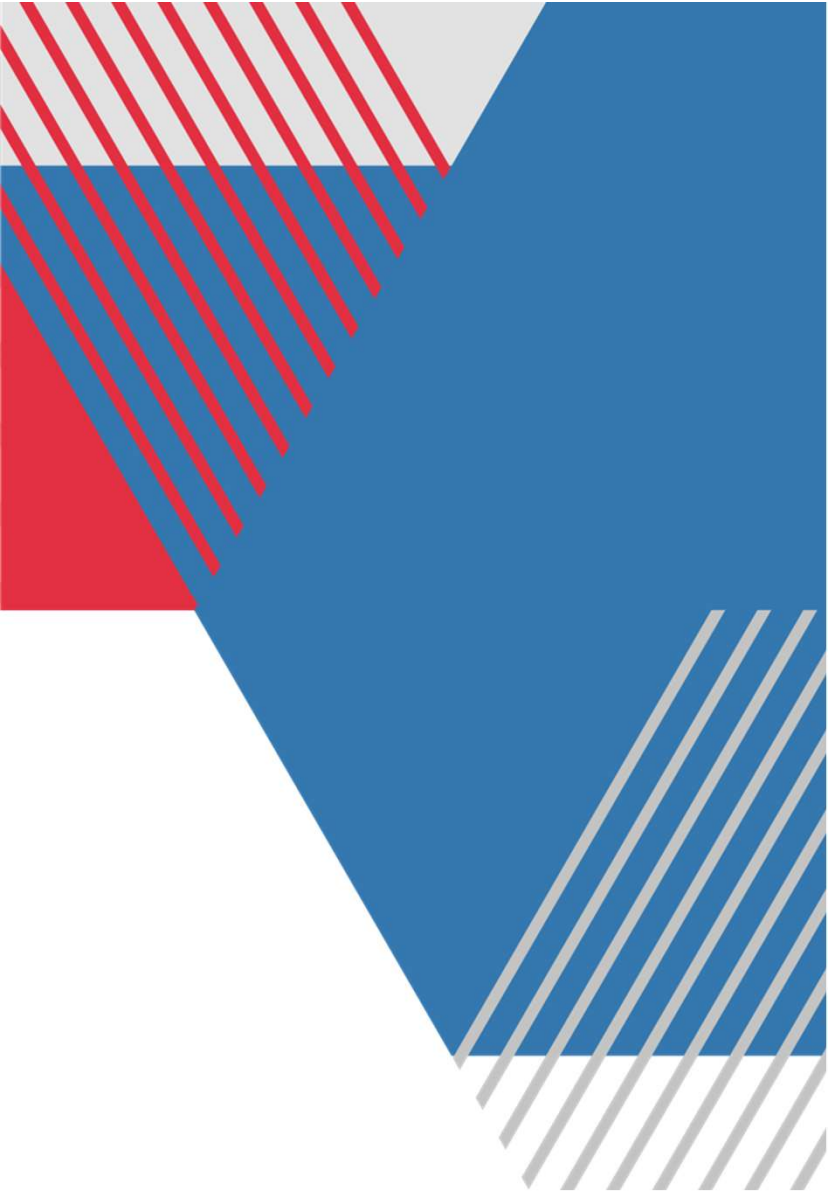
- Only voters who are blind, have another physical disability, who can't read, write or speak English, can get assistance.
- Voters who are intoxicated **cannot** receive assistance.
- Support animals that assist people with disabilities should be admitted into all buildings



Once Voting Begins

Giving assistance

- 2 Election Judges, one from each party, assist the voter, **or**
- Voter choose their own assistant. Both the voters and the person who is assisting must sign an affidavit.
- Candidates and Precinct Committeeperson may act as assistants, if the voter chooses them.
- The voter's employer, agent of the employer, or an officer or agent of the voter's union cannot aid the voter.



Once Voting Begins

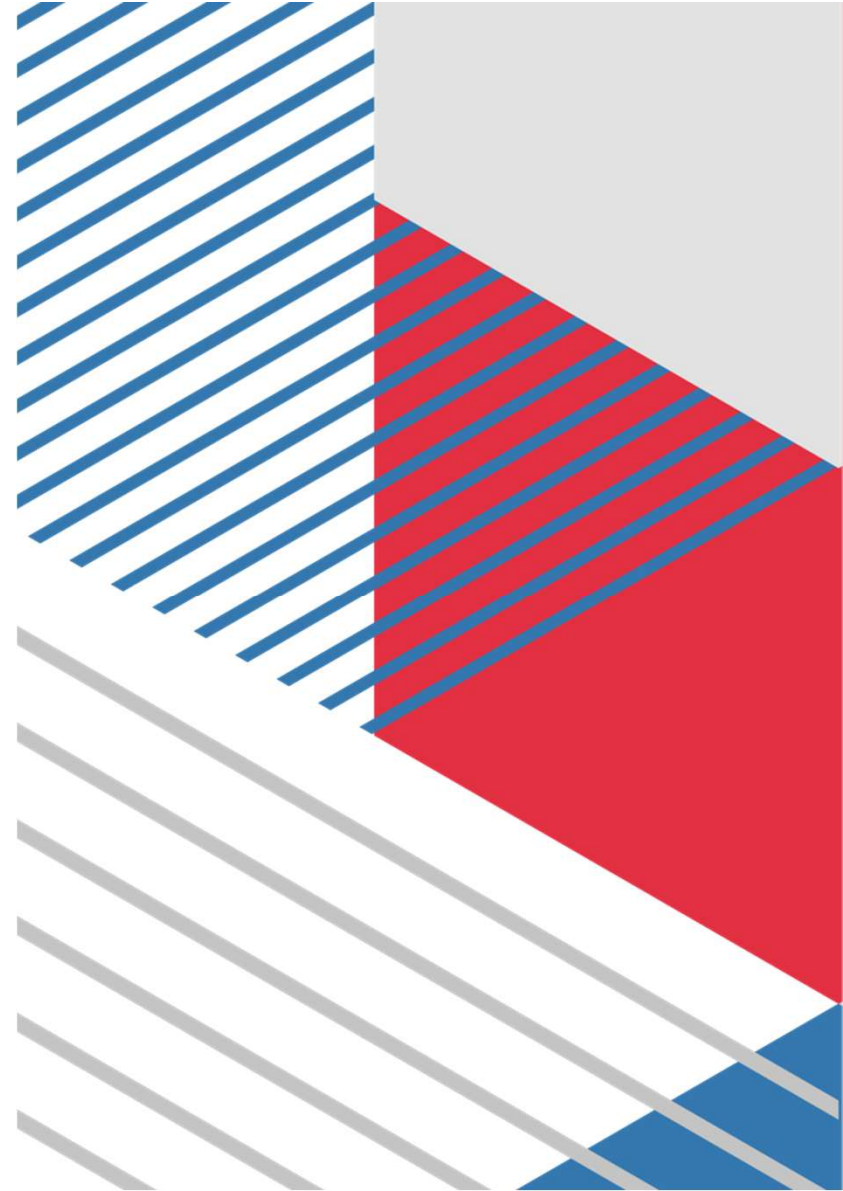
Giving assistance

- If you hear anything or see anything, you are sworn to silence.
- If asked by a voter to help, refer them to an election judge.

Once Voting Begins

Curbside Voting

- The McHenry County Clerk offers curbside voting at the Election Center, 410 S. Eastwood in Woodstock.
- They require notice 24 hours ahead of time and will have all materials available.
- Two election judges from different parties will deliver the ballot to the voter. The election judges will remain until the ballot is completely filled out and returned to the election judges, who, upon re-entering the polling place will deposit the ballot immediately in the ballot box/tabulator.
- The poll watcher may accompany the election judges in order to observe.



Key Voters' Rights to Monitor

Your main job is to make the election judges follow the rules and votes are not suppressed.

Violations of these rules should be recorded on the incident report, and to the chair to report to the clerk or the voter protection hotline.



Things to watch for

Republican Poll Watchers

- There have been instances where Republican poll watchers become 'aggressive' vote challengers.

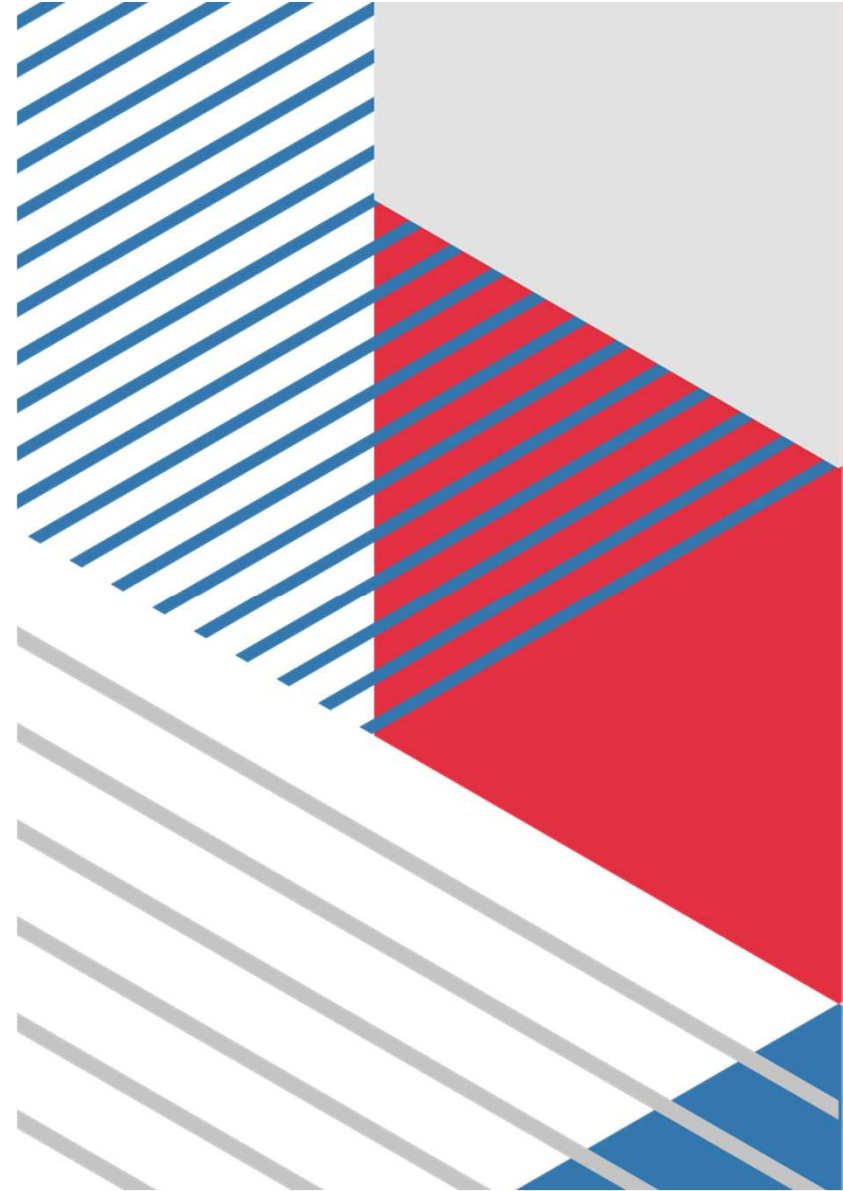
For instance, a challenger may ask a voter to prove who they are by showing ID.

- **There should be a valid reason for a challenge.**
Profiling is not a valid reason.

Things to watch for

Illinois voters do not have to provide identification at the polling place in order to vote a regular ballot, except for:

- A first-time voter who registered by mail or online and did not include proper identification
- A voter whose qualifications are challenged, and a majority of judges agree.





Things to watch for

There is same-day voter registration

- To register on election day, the voter must have two forms of ID, one of which has their current address.
- A voter who cannot present sufficient identification may vote a provisional ballot, but **the voter should be encouraged to get proper ID and come back rather than vote a provisional ballot.**

You do not want voters to vote a provisional ballot if it can be avoided. Voters who vote provisionally because of ID problems are unlikely to cure their ballots, meaning they won't be counted. However, it is better than not voting at all.

Things to watch for

A voter who is not on the rolls may vote a provisional ballot.

- Prior to voting a provisional ballot, they should **check to make sure they are at the correct polling place.** We have a quick link sheet to help a voter (OUTSIDE) find their polling place if the judges didn't provide it.
- It is better for a voter to vote at their correct precinct than take a provisional ballot.





Things to watch for

If a voter has moved...

- Within the same precinct 27 or fewer days before the election - they can vote a regular ballot at their polling place after signing an affidavit of eligibility
- To a different precinct within 30 days before the election and has not transferred his or her registration - the voter can vote a regular ballot at their previous polling place after signing an affidavit of eligibility.

They may be able to vote for federal candidates at other polling places.

Things to watch for

Other

- Anyone who is in line at 7pm when the polls close must be allowed to vote.
- Illinois law permits convicted felons to vote as long as they have completed their sentence (felons on probation or parole may vote).
- If a voter spoils a ballot and has not cast the ballot, the voter has the right to receive a new ballot after returning the spoiled ballot.
- If a ballot is rejected at the tabulator because the election judge did not initial the ballot, that ballot **MUST BE SPOILED**. The voter will need to be given a new ballot and vote again.





Things to watch for

Vote by Mail ballots

- As long as a voter who requested a Vote by Mail (VBM) ballot has not submitted it and is otherwise qualified, the voter should be allowed to vote a regular ballot if:
 - they turn in the VBM ballot for cancellation or,
 - they complete an affidavit that they did not receive the ballot or,
 - they were informed the election authority did not receive the ballot.
- If the voter received the VBM ballot and did not return it, the voter may vote a provisional ballot.
- TIP: Voters should be encouraged to bring their VBM with them to surrender, along with all the envelopes if they intend to vote in person.

Illegal Activities

Illegal Activities to Watch Out For

Electioneering

- Electioneering is any promotion of a candidate or public question, and it is prohibited inside the campaign-free zone.
- A campaign-free zone, designated by markers, is strictly enforced within 100 feet of the entrance to the room where voting occurs.
- Some examples of prohibited items:
 - campaign signs
 - clothing or button promoting a candidate or public question, or
 - any printed campaign information.



Illegal Activities to Watch Out For

Electioneering

- If the 100-foot measurement from the polling room's door is located within the building of a public or private school or a place of worship, the boundary for the campaign-free zone is located at the building's front door so electioneering is limited to the outside of the building.
- Private schools and places of worship may ban electioneering from their entire property.

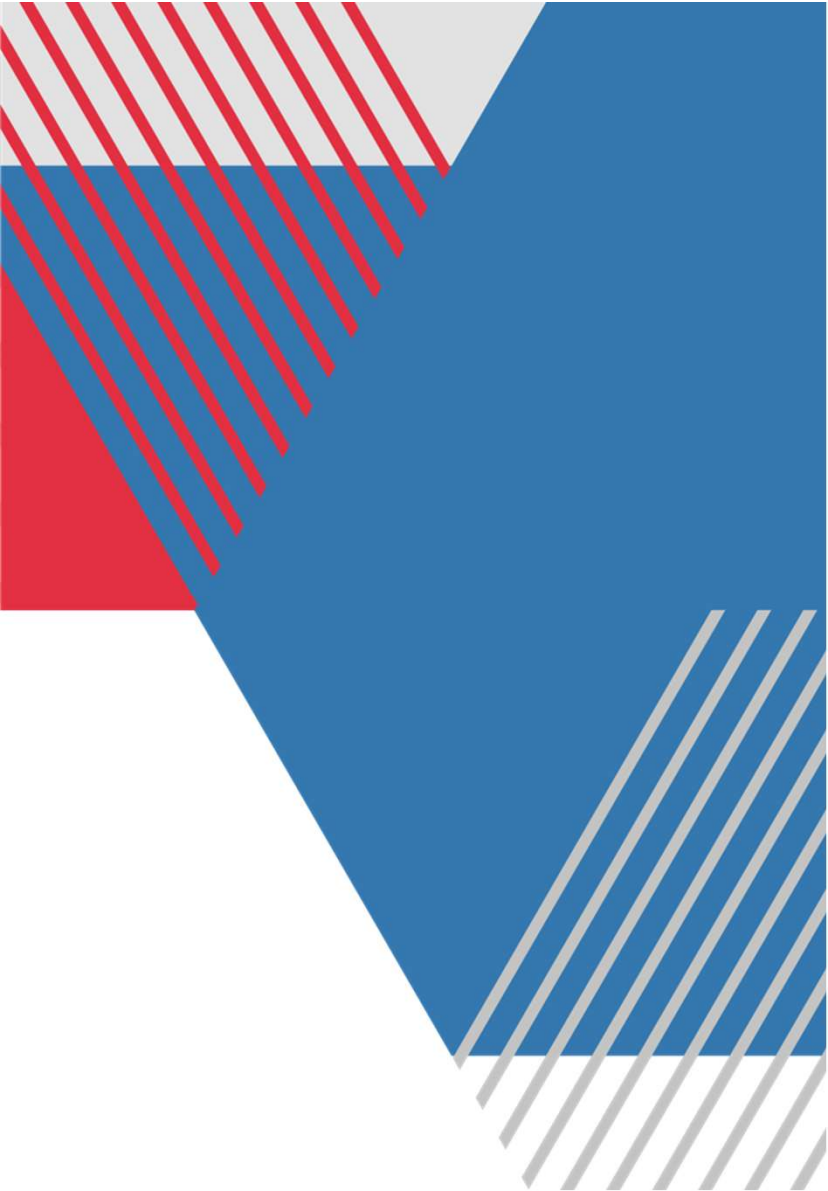




Illegal Activities to Watch Out For

Other

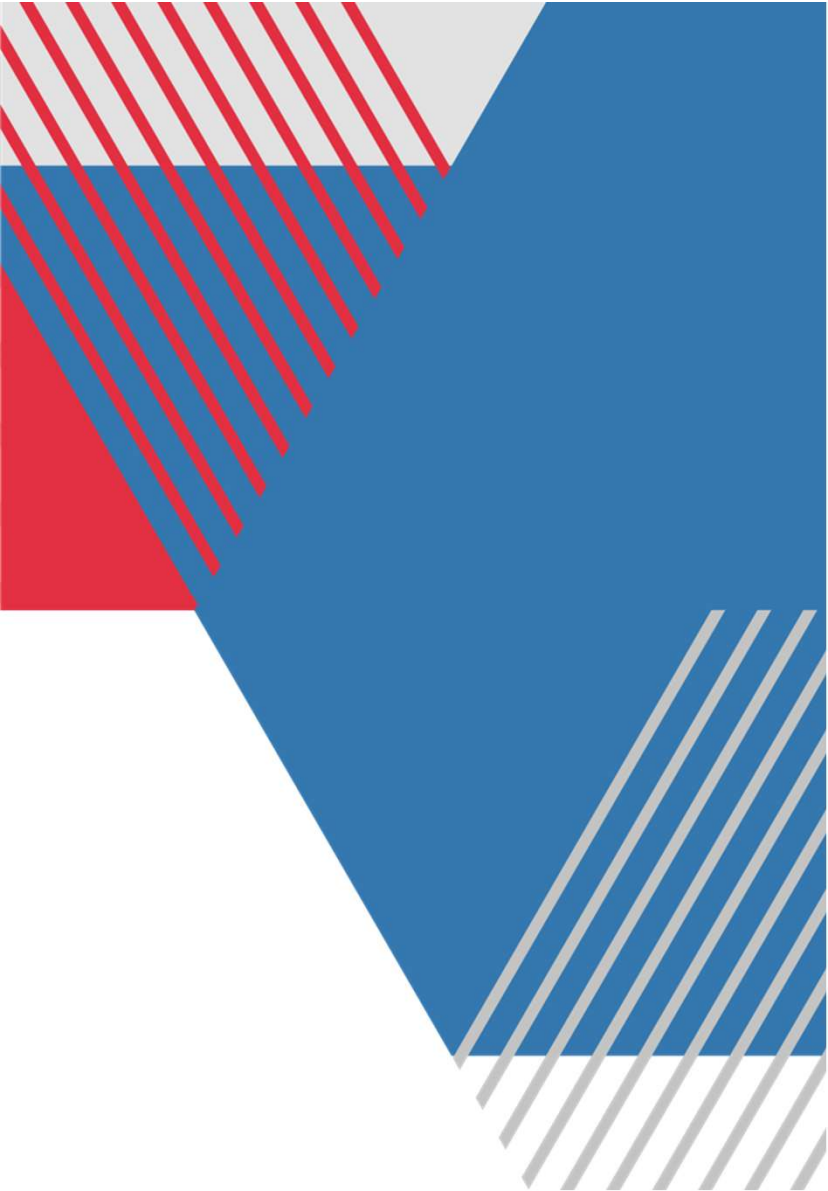
- Voters attempting to leave the polling place with a ballot or ballots.
- Payment for a vote.
- Impersonating a registered voter (signature is not a match).
- Tampering with voting equipment.
- Interfering with the voting process.
- Harassing the election judges.
- Harassing or intimidating voters (checking on what is going on outside occasionally is a good idea).



Illegal Activities to Watch Out For

Other

- Interfering with the voting process.
- Illegal voter assistance or instruction.
- Misinformation to voters outside the polling place (polling place has moved, closed, etc.).
- A **law enforcement official** may be in the polling place to preserve order and carry out **lawful directions given by the judges only**.



Illegal Activities to Watch Out For

Other

- **Federal agents** appearing at the Precinct Polling Place.
 - **Illinois is prepared;** DPI is in contact with state and local authorities, as well as the DNC and candidates.
 - This is the only time you may take videos/photos in the polling place. Document everything in an incident report, including witnesses.
 - DO NOT overreact and scare voters from coming into polling places to vote.



It's Almost Over ...

When the Polls Close

- Make sure everyone in line at 7pm votes. If there is a line, make sure the end of the line at 7pm is marked.
- **You must be inside before 7pm to witness the closing of the polls.**
- Observe the process of closing the polling place by the judges
 - All ballots and electronic voting records should be sealed properly before they leave the polling place.
 - Each machine should have a tape printed and displayed where the public can view it. **You should request a tape to be run for you.**



When the Polls Close

- Send your photos of the tape you collected at the end of the night:
- Use GuestCam. No app needed. Just scan the QR code below and follow the instructions to upload your photos of the tapes.

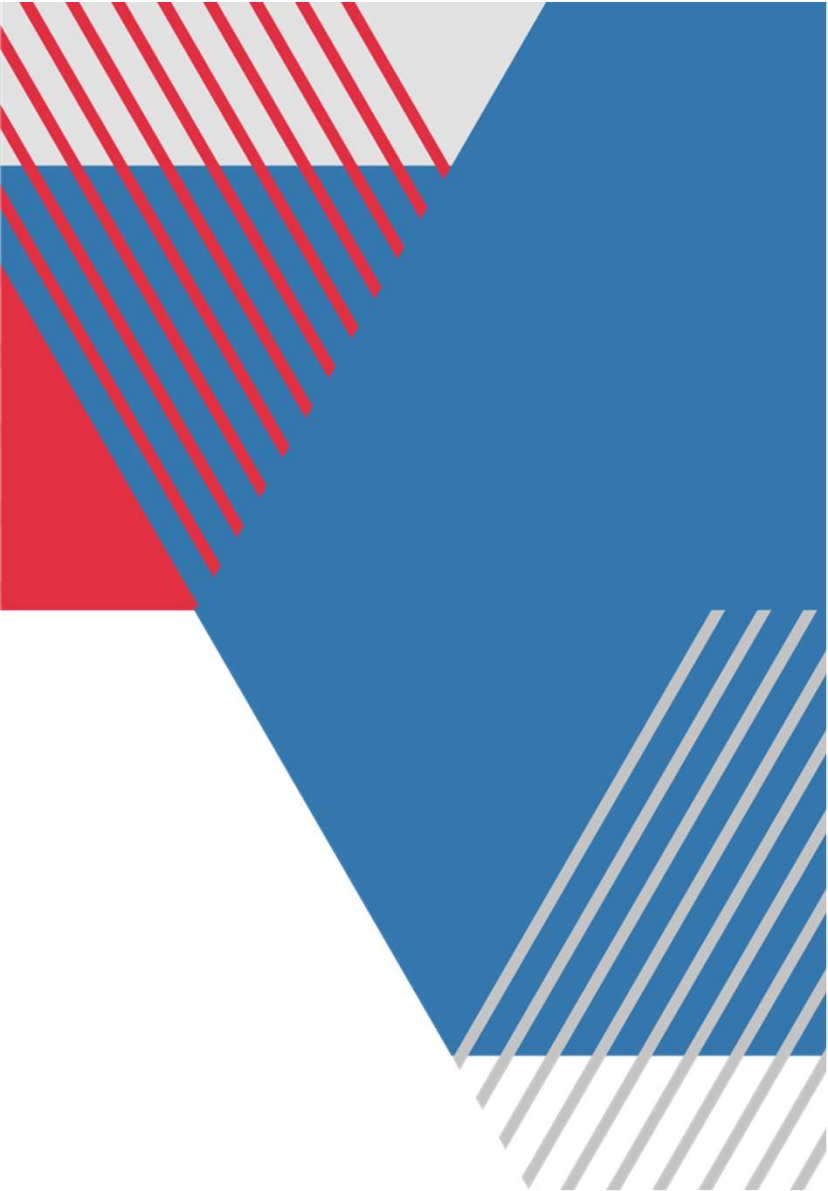


- OR text them to 815-263-9659
- OR email the photos to chair@mchenrydems.org
- OR bring them to the election night party
- OR let me know how you'd like to get them to me.



Conclusion

A poll watcher should establish a cooperative relationship with the judges.



Elections are messy...

- Some judges are new, they are incompetent, they don't know the new equipment, they don't like technology.
- Judges only do this once or twice a year.
- Some judges will be trying to mess it up.
- Most are trying to do their best.



Elections are messy...

So...

- **Try and establish a cooperative relationship with the judges. Be polite to the judges,** but firm and persistent in making sure that the laws and procedures are followed correctly.
- **Pick you battles carefully and thoughtfully.** Where the electioneering boundary cone is placed is less important than denying someone a vote.
- You can't win every battle. Ultimately election judges are the authority in the polling place. **But document!**

Addressing Issues

To reiterate:

1. Election Judges are the first point of contact.
2. Election Judges should be asked to call the Clerk's office for clarification or help if they don't know what to do.
3. Text or call County Chair – Ruth at 815-263-9659
 1. Chair will call the County Clerk
 2. Chair will call the DPI Hotline and our attorney or escalate it from there.
 3. Only call the hotline yourself if you can't get through to Ruth.
4. Call the police only if you believe you or others are in physical danger.



Poll Watcher Incident Report

All these forms will be found on our website by using the following link:

www.mchenrydems.org/poll_workers

Name: _____ Date / Time: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Polling Place: _____ Precinct: _____

Incident Type - see reverse for examples

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Polling Place Issue | ☐ Vote by Mail Issue |
| ☐ Election Judge (EJ) Issue | ☐ Eligibility Challenged / Provisional Ballot |
| ☐ Voting Machine / Equipment Issue / Balloting Issue | ☐ Voter Intimidation / Misinformation |
| ☐ Voter or Poll Watcher Partisan Conduct | ☐ Other _____ |

Describe the incident, including any requests the voter and/or you made of the judges.

The Clerk's Office was called ☐ Yes DPMC was called ☐ Yes The Voter Protection Hot Line was called ☐

Describe the outcome. Was incident resolved? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Names of those involved. Names of witnesses - Include contact information if possible.

If you need more space, feel free to attach additional sheets.

Quick Links & Contacts

All these forms will be found on our website by using the following link:

www.mchenrydems.org/poll_workers



McHenry County Clerk
Registration Check/Ballot Locator
<https://mchenry-il.connect4.clarityelections.com/sample-ballot-locator/#Search>



IL State Board of Elections
Registration Lookup
<https://ova.elections.il.gov/RegistrationLookup.aspx>

You should first try to resolve any issues with the Election Judges on site before calling for assistance. You should call the appropriate hotline with any issues that cannot be resolved on-site.

If problems occur, contact these people in the following order:

1. Election Judges - Each of the judges have equal power. If there is a dispute over the interpretation or application of the rules, the judges should vote together on all decisions - and you can ask for that. If the judges decide to apply a rule in a manner you believe is incorrect or there is a violation of the rules, go to the next step...
2. Call or text Ruth, Chair of DPMC, at 815-263-9659. She will determine whether the Clerk or our attorney needs to be called.
3. County Clerk - 815-334-4242
4. Voter Protection Hotline - available 6am-7:30pm.
- (855) 458-6837 or (855) IL VOTES
- Email: voterpro@ildems.com
5. Please only call the police if you feel you are in danger, not to report voting irregularities.

REMEMBER to fill out the Poll Worker Incident Report and turn it into the Party.

Questions?

.

