

ILLINOIS POLLWATCHERS

Their Rights and Limitations

Illinois law provides for pollwatchers to be present in the polling place during an election. Pollwatchers are intended to observe the conduct of the election and their prime concern is the integrity and fairness of the election.

What are pollwatchers?

The great majority of election officials are honest and dedicated; however, even the most honest election officials can make mistakes. 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.

What are the qualifications necessary to become a pollwatcher?

Generally, a pollwatcher must be registered to vote in the County in which he/she is pollwatching and must be affiliated with the political party he is representing. (In primary elections, candidates are allowed 2 pollwatchers per precinct and at least one of the pollwatchers must be registered to vote in the precinct or ward in which he is pollwatching.)

Who authorizes an individual to become a pollwatcher?

Pollwatchers may represent established political parties, candidates, qualified civic organizations, or organized proponents or opponents of ballot propositions. Each pollwatcher must have credentials issued by the election authority, and these credentials must be presented by the pollwatcher to the election judges immediately upon entering the polling place.

What are some of the specific rights of pollwatchers?

- ✓ Before the first ballot is cast, pollwatchers may observe that the ballot box is empty;
- ✓ Pollwatchers may position themselves near enough to the election judges to examine the applications for ballot;
- ✓ Pollwatchers may observe as the judges compare the voter applicant's signature on the application with the signature on the registration records;
- ✓ Pollwatchers may watch as the judges initial and distribute the ballots to voters, and as the judges deposit the ballots into the ballot box after the voters have voted;
- ✓ Pollwatchers may challenge a person's right to vote. A reason for the challenge must be stated. (Possible reasons include; the person voted earlier in the day, the person moved, or the person lacks qualifications);
- ✓ The judges of election determine whether or not to sustain a challenge;
- ✓ Pollwatchers may observe the counting procedures after the polls close.

What should a pollwatcher do if he observes an administrative error or sees an apparent violation on the part of election judges or voters?

The pollwatcher should politely inform the election judges if he observes an error or an apparent violation. If the error or violation continues, the pollwatcher should record his observations, immediately contact the election authority and remain at the polling place until proper authorities arrive. Under no circumstances should a pollwatcher argue with the election judges or interfere with the election process.

Is there a limit to the number of pollwatchers allowed in a polling place?

When over-crowding interferes with the orderly conduct of the election, the judges of election may limit the number of pollwatchers. The election judges may cause the removal of any pollwatcher who is disrupting the election process.

YOU CAN HELP TO PREVENT VOTE FRAUD BY REPORTING UNUSUAL ACTIVITIES OR IRREGULARITIES *IMMEDIATELY* TO THE ELECTION JUDGES AND/OR THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES.

REMEMBER.....

Pollwatchers are official observers only. They may observe the conduct of the election before, during, and after the polls close. All pollwatchers must present valid credentials upon entering the polling place -

The judges of election are the sole authority in the polling place on election day -

No person, except a judge, may handle or touch election supplies and materials -

A police officer may be in the polling place to preserve order and carry out lawful directions given by the judges -

Electioneering, or any type of campaigning must not take place in or within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place during voting hours.

The publication *A Guide for Pollwatchers* outlines the necessary qualifications and responsibilities of pollwatchers. The pamphlet, *Preventing VOTE FRAUD* spells out some telltale signs of possible voting irregularities that should be reported to the election judges and/or election authorities. Both of these publications may be obtained by writing or calling your Illinois State Board of Elections.