

POLL WATCHER'S GUIDE



Issued by the

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INTRODUCTION

This “Poll Watcher’s Guide” has been designed to familiarize poll watchers with their basic rights and responsibilities. The integrity of elections is a concern of all citizens, and although poll watchers may represent particular candidates, political parties or specific-purpose political action committees, their main interest is in the conduct of a fair and honest election.

A poll watcher’s role in an election is established by Chapter 33 of the Texas Election Code and is defined as follows:

Poll Watcher – a person appointed to observe the conduct of an election on behalf of:

- a candidate,
- a political party, or
- the proponents or opponents of a measure (specific-purpose political action committees).

Throughout this guide, all references are made to appropriate sections in the Texas Election Code, unless otherwise noted.

QUICK POINTS TO REMEMBER

- In order to serve as a poll watcher, you must show up with a certificate of appointment which includes:
 - Name, residence address, and voter registration number of the poll watcher;
 - The signature of the person(s) making the appointment;
 - The election and the number of the precinct where the poll watcher is to serve;
 - An indication of the capacity in which the appointing authority is acting;
 - In an election on a measure, an identification of the measure (if more than one is to be voted on) and a statement of which side the appointee represents;
 - The signature of the poll watcher; and
 - Be ready to counter-sign in front of the election judge.
- An affidavit executed by the poll watcher that the poll watcher will not have possession of any mechanical or electronic means of recording images or sound while serving as a watcher unless the poll watcher disables or deactivates the device. [**NEW LAW: House Bill 2817**].
- If you want to vote in a different precinct (from the location of service), we recommend voting early before your service as a poll watcher.

QUALIFICATIONS OF WATCHER

Q. What are the qualifications of a watcher?

A. A watcher must:

- be a registered voter of the territory (e.g., city, school district) covered by the election and of the county for November general elections, *primary elections*, or other countywide elections; [Sec. 33.031]
- not be a candidate for public office in an election held on the day the watcher seeks to serve; [Sec. 33.032]
- not hold an elective public office; [Sec. 33.033]
- not be an employee of an election judge or clerk serving at the same polling place; [Sec. 33.035]
- not been finally convicted of an offense in connection with conduct directly attributable to an election; [Sec. 33.035] and
- not be related within the second degree of consanguinity or affinity (as determined by Tex. Govt. Code, Chapter 573, Subchapter B, Secs. 573.022 - 573.025) to an election judge or clerk serving at that polling place. A watcher may be related to the candidate the watcher is representing. [Sec. 33.033]

Q: Can a person who has been finally convicted of an election offense serve as a watcher?

A: No. A person convicted of an election offense cannot serve as a watcher. [Sec. 33.035]

Q. Does a poll watcher need to live within the election precinct in which the watcher is serving?

A. No.

Q. Can a person serve as a watcher in an election if they are a candidate running for a public office?

A. No, not if the person is a candidate running for office in an election to be held on the same day. [Sec. 33.032].

Q. Are elected public officials allowed to serve as watchers in any election?

A. No. [Sec. 33.034].

Q. Can officers of a political party serve as watchers?

A. Yes. They may serve because they are not public officers. [Sec. 33.034].

Q. Can a watcher work for or be related to any of the election officials?

A. No. The watcher cannot be an employer of or employee of or related within the second degree to an election judge, election clerk, early voting clerk or deputy clerk.

Q. Can a candidate's spouse or child serve as a watcher?

A. Yes.

APPOINTMENT OF WATCHER

Appointment of watcher by political parties:

Q. Who appoints a watcher on behalf of political parties?

A. 1. The county chair of each political party that has a nominee(s) on the official ballot may appoint watchers. [Sec. 33.003(a)].

2. Any three members of the county executive committee may appoint watchers, if the county chair fails to act. [Sec. 33.003(b)].

Appointment of watcher by a candidate:

Q. Who appoints a watcher on behalf of candidates?

- A. 1. A candidate whose name appears on the official ballot or on the list of declared write-in candidates in an election for any office (other than the office of Vice-President of the United States) may appoint a watcher. For a state office that is filled by voters of more than one county, the candidate's campaign treasurer also may appoint a watcher. [Sec. 33.002(a) & (b)].
2. For a federal office that is filled by voters of more than one county, the chair or treasurer of the candidate's principal campaign committee or a designated agent of the chair or treasurer may appoint a watcher. [Sec. 33.002(c)].
 3. A group of registered voters may appoint watchers on behalf of a write-in candidate in an election in which declarations are not required to be filed. The minimum number of voters required to make an appointment under this section is the lesser of 15 or five percent of the registered voters of the appropriate territory as determined from the list of registered voters to be used for the election.
 - To be eligible to sign an appointment of a watcher to a precinct polling place, a person must be a registered voter of the precinct.
 - To be eligible to appoint a watcher to an early voting polling place, early ballot board meeting, or a central counting station, a person must be a registered voter of the county, city, school district or other political subdivision conducting the election. [Sec. 33.004].

Appointment of watcher for elections on measures:

Q. Who appoints a watcher for elections on measures?

- A. The campaign treasurer or an assistant campaign treasurer of a specific purpose political action committee that supports or opposes a measure may appoint watchers. [Sec. 33.005(a)]. For information on establishing a specific purpose political action committee, please contact the Texas Ethics Commission at 1-512-463-5800 or www.ethics.state.tx.us.

Maximum number of watchers:

Q. What is the maximum number of watchers that can be appointed by each appointing authority?

- A. 1. A maximum of seven (7) watchers may be appointed for each early voting polling place (No more than two may be on duty at the same location and at the same time); and
2. A maximum of two (2) watchers may be appointed for each precinct polling place, meeting place for an early voting ballot board, or central counting station involved in the election. [Sec. 33.007].

Activities a poll watcher may observe:

A poll watcher is entitled to observe the following activities at early voting by personal appearance locations and election day locations:

1. Early voting by personal appearance polling place activities, including time before and after the polls close.

Note: If present, poll watcher signs ballot box seals placed on early voting ballot boxes.

2. Election day polling place activities, including time before and after the polls close.

3. Early voting ballot board meeting activities.
4. Central counting station activities.
5. Central accumulation system activities.
6. Signature verification committee activities.
7. Voter being assisted by an election official.
8. Inspecting and securing the voting equipment. [Sec. 33.059]. (Must present certificate of appointment; certificate must be returned to the watcher.)
9. Delivery of election results from polling place.

ACCEPTANCE OF WATCHER

Time for reporting to the polling place:

Q. What time do watchers need to report to the polling place, and how long do they need to stay at that polling place?

- A. 1. At the polling place on election day, a poll watcher:
- may begin service at any time after the presiding judge arrives and may stay at the polling place until election officials complete their duties.
 - may come and go after watcher has served 5 consecutive hours. [Sec. 33.052].
- NOTE:** If watcher leaves polling area temporarily to use cell phone or other wireless device, this temporary absence does not affect his 5 hours of consecutive service.
2. At an early voting polling place, a poll watcher:
- may be present at the polling place at any time it is open and until voting equipment is secured on the close of voting each day.
 - may serve during the hours the watcher chooses. [Sec. 33.053].
- NOTE:** A poll watcher may be appointed to observe early voting by personal appearance only; a poll watcher is not entitled to observe the procedures related to early voting by mail. **NEW LAW: House Bill 2449:** a poll watcher can no longer obtain a copy of an application for a ballot to be voted by mail from the early voting clerk until after election day. [Sec. 86.014]. The information placed on the early voting roster is not available for public inspection by anyone until the first business day after election day or the day following the day the voter's ballot is received by the early voting clerk, except to the voter seeking to verify that the information is accurate. [Sec. 87.121].
3. At an early voting ballot board meeting (including the signature verification committee), a poll watcher:
- may be present at any time the board is processing or counting ballots and until the board completes its duties.
 - may not leave during voting hours on election day without the early voting ballot board judge's permission once the board has begun counting the ballots. [Sec. 33.054].
4. At the central counting station, a poll watcher:
- may be present at any time the central counting station is open for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station.

- may not leave during voting hours without the presiding judge’s permission, if the counting of ballots at the central counting station has begun. [Sec. 33.055].
- **NOTE: House Bill 2194** authorizes the presiding judge of the central counting station, in cooperation with the county clerk/elections administrator, to choose to withhold the release of vote totals until the last voter has voted.

CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT

Issuance of certificate:

The appointing authority must issue a certificate of appointment to the watcher. [Sec. 33.006(a)].

Q. What information needs to be on the certificate?

- A. The certificate of appointment must be in writing and must include the following:
- Name, residence address, voter registration number, and signature of the watcher;
 - The election and the number of the precinct (or other location, for example, early voting ballot board meeting) at which the watcher is appointed to serve;
 - The signature of the person(s) making the appointment;
 - An indication of the capacity in which the appointing authority is acting, (example: as a candidate, a campaign treasurer or assistant campaign treasurer of a specific-purpose political action committee).
 - In an election on a measure, an identification of the measure (if more than one is to be voted on) and a statement identifying which side the appointee represents; and [Sec. 33.006(b)].
 - An affidavit executed by the poll watcher that the poll watcher will not have possession of any mechanical or electronic means of recording images or sound while serving as a watcher unless the poll watcher disables or deactivates the device. [**NEW LAW: House Bill 2817**]. (This affidavit is signed in the presence of the presiding judge and also serves as the countersignature, which is discussed below.)
 - Officially-prescribed poll watcher appointment forms may be found at this link: <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/forms/index.shtml>.

Q. What are the requirements for a certificate of a watcher appointed on behalf of a non-declared write-in candidate?

- A. Additional requirements necessary for a certificate of appointment of a watcher for a non-declared write-in candidate include:
- the residence address and voter registration number of the lesser of 15 voters or 5 percent of the registered voters in the precinct or political subdivision, as applicable;
 - the signed statement of the candidate, or a person who would be authorized to make appointments on the candidate’s behalf if the candidate’s name appeared on the ballot, that the appointment is made with the signer’s consent; and [Sec. 33.004(b)]
 - the residence or office address of the write-in candidate or the person who would be authorized to make appointments on the candidate’s behalf if the candidate’s name appeared on the ballot. If the candidate does not sign, the signer must indicate his or her relationship to the candidate. [Sec. 33.006(c)].

Q. How does one present a certificate of appointment?

- A. 1. A watcher must deliver a certificate of appointment to the presiding judge at the time the watcher reports for service. [Sec. 33.051(a)].

2. The officer presented with a watcher's certificate of appointment must require the watcher to countersign the certificate in the officer's presence to verify that the watcher is the same person who originally signed the certificate. The watcher's signature is in the portion of the certificate containing the affidavit that the watcher does not have possession of any prohibited recording devices serves as the countersignature. [Sec. 33.051(b)].
3. A watcher may not be accepted for service unless an affidavit executed by the poll watcher that the poll watcher will not have possession of any mechanical or electronic means of recording images or sound while serving as a watcher unless the poll watcher disables or deactivates the device. [**NEW LAW: House Bill 2817**].
4. The judge must keep the certificate in envelope no. 2 (or other designated container) which is returned to the custodian of election records after the election. [Sec. 66.023(7)].
5. The certificate of a watcher serving at an early voting polling place must be retained at the polling place until voting is concluded at the polling place. At each subsequent time that the watcher reports for service, the watcher shall inform the clerk or deputy in charge. The officer may require the watcher to sign the watcher's name in the officer's presence, for comparison with the signature on the certificate, if the officer is uncertain of the watcher's identity. [Sec. 33.051(d)].
6. If the watcher is rejected, the certificate should be returned to the watcher with a signed statement of the reason for the rejection. [Sec. 33.051(e)].

DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES OF WATCHER

Q. What are a watcher's duties?

- A. The primary duty of a watcher is to observe the conduct of the election at the location where the watcher has been appointed. A watcher may point out to an election judge or clerk any observed irregularity or violation of the Texas Election Code. However, if the clerk refers the watcher to the judge, the watcher may not discuss the matter further with the clerk unless the presiding judge invites the discussion. [Sec. 33.058(b)].

Q: May watchers wear name tags?

- A: Watchers are **NOT** allowed to wear name tags.

Q. What are watchers NOT allowed to do while on duty?

- A. 1. Talk with an election officer regarding the election except to call attention to an irregularity or violation. [Sec. 33.058(a)(1)].
2. Converse with a voter. [Sec. 33.058(a)(2)].
3. Converse with other watchers. [Sec. 33.058]
4. Communicate in any manner with a voter regarding the election. [Sec. 33.058(a)(3)].
5. Leave during voting hours on election day without the presiding judge's permission unless the watcher has completed 5 consecutive hours of service at the polling place. If the watcher leaves without permission and prior to completing the 5 hours of service, the presiding judge may refuse to readmit the watcher.

Note: The watcher must be allowed to leave to use a wireless communication device and be readmitted to the polling place, if the watcher returns promptly. This does not constitute an interruption in the watcher's 5 hours of consecutive service. [Sec. 33.052(b)].

6. Reveal the following information before the polls close:
- How a voter has voted; this offense is a third degree felony. [Sec. 61.006(b)].

- The number of votes that have been received for a candidate or for or against a measure; this offense is a Class C misdemeanor. [Sec. 61.007(a)(1)].
- A candidate's position relative to other candidates in the tabulation of the votes; this offense is a Class C misdemeanor. [Sec. 61.007(a)(2)].
- Whether a measure is passing or failing; this offense is a Class C misdemeanor. [Sec. 61.007(a)(3)].
- The names of persons who have or have not voted in the election; this offense is a Class C misdemeanor. [Sec. 61.007(a)(4)].

Q. What is a watcher permitted to do while on duty?

A. A watcher must be permitted, but is not required to:

1. Witness the installation of voting system equipment at the polling place. [Sec.33.059].
2. Observe the securing of voting system equipment before the election. [Sec. 33.059].
3. A poll watcher may leave the polling place temporarily in order to use a cell phone or other wireless communication device. If the poll watcher promptly returns, he or she is considered to have served continuously as that term is used for calculating his or her continuous 5 hours, which allows the watcher to come and go. [Sec. 62.011].
4. Sit or stand conveniently near the election officials to observe the activities of the election. [Sec. 33.056(a)].
5. Make written notes while on duty. However, if the watcher is permitted to leave the polling place while the polls are open, the watcher may be required to leave his or her written notes with another person selected by the watcher who is on duty at the polling place. [Sec. 33.056(d)].
6. Observe assistance given to voters by election officials and inspect the ballot before it is deposited in the ballot box to determine if it was prepared in accordance with the voter's wishes. [Sec. 33.057].
7. Inspect the returns and other records prepared by the election officers. [Sec. 33.056(c)].
8. A watcher may not participate but may observe the tallying and counting of the votes to verify that the votes are tallied and read correctly. [Sec. 33.056(b)].
9. Accompany authorized election officials in delivering election records from a precinct polling place, an early voting polling place, a meeting place for an early voting ballot board, or a central counting station. [Sec. 33.060(a)]. Note: Poll watcher and election officials do not need to ride in the same vehicle. [Sec. 33.060(b)].
10. Witness securing of the voting system equipment at the time the polls close. [Sec. 125.035(b)(4)].
11. Receive an English translation of any language spoken other than English between an election official and a voter. [Sec. 61.036].

Q. Can a watcher leave the election day polling place temporarily during the time the polls are open?

A. Yes. Once a watcher has served more than 5 consecutive hours at the polling place, the watcher gains the privilege to leave the polling place and return at the hours he or she chooses, except that if the watcher is present when ballots are being counted, the watcher may not leave until the counting is complete. Additionally, the watcher may briefly leave the polling place to use his or her cell phone or other wireless device, and this does not interrupt the watcher's 5 hours of continuous service, if the watcher returns promptly. [Sec. 33.052(a)].

Q. Can a watcher leave in order to vote at another polling place?

A. The watcher may leave to vote and return if the watcher has served more than 5 consecutive hours at the polling place. If the watcher has not yet served 5 consecutive hours, whether he or she will be allowed back into the polling place is at the judge's discretion. [Sec. 33.052(a)]

Q. Can a watcher leave the polling place after the time for closing the polls without obtaining permission from the presiding judge?

A. The watcher may leave without permission from the judge; however, if the watcher wishes to return to the polling place, the watcher must have served at least 5 consecutive hours at the polling place. If not, once the watcher leaves, he or she may return only at the discretion of the judge. Additionally, if the watcher is present at the polling place when ballots are being counted, the watcher may not leave until the counting is complete. [Sec. 33.052(a)]

MISCELLANEOUS

Activity Prohibited by Law:

Q. What illegal activities should a watcher look for?

A. The election judge may be notified of any activity that appears to be prohibited by law. If any of the following activities occur, bring it to the election judge's attention and note the individual(s) involved, including time and place of occurrence, if possible:

1. Election workers allowing voters who do not have a current voter registration certificate to vote without providing proof of identification. If a voter does not have his or her voter registration certificate, Texas law requires that he or she provide one of the following forms of identification:
 - (a) a driver's license or personal identification card issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety or similar documents from other states, regardless of whether the license or card has expired;
 - (b) a form of identification containing a photograph that establishes a person's identity (such as an employee identification card);
 - (c) a birth certificate or other document confirming birth that is admissible in a court of law and establishes a person's identity;
 - (d) United States citizenship papers;
 - (e) a United States passport;
 - (f) official mail addressed to the person by name from a governmental agency;
 - (g) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter; or
 - (h) any other form of identification prescribed by the Secretary of State's office. [Sec. 63.0101].
2. Electioneering and loitering within 100 feet of the entrance of the building in which a polling place is located. [Sec. 61.003]. Examples of electioneering include, but are not limited to the following:
 - wearing or exhibiting a badge, insignia, emblem, or other similar communicative device item relating to a candidate, measure or political party. [Sec. 61.010].

NOTE: An election judge, an election clerk, a state or federal election inspector, a certified peace officer, or a special peace officer appointed for the polling place by the

presiding judge shall wear while on duty in the area is required to wear a tag or official badge that indicates their name and title or position. [Sec. 61.010]

- unauthorized posting of signs, posters or other similar items. [Sec. 62.013]

NOTE: A candidate in an election commits a Class C misdemeanor if he or she is in the polling place for a purpose other than (1) voting or (2) official business in the building in which the polling place is located; however, a candidate may assist a voter without violating this section. [Sec. 61.001(b)]

EXCEPTION: It is a defense to prosecution under Section 61.001(b) if the candidate is (1) not in plain view of persons in the voting area or the area where voters are being qualified and (2) not engaged in campaign activity. [Sec. 61.001(c)].

3. Unlawful operation of a sound amplification device or sound-truck used for campaigning purposes within 1,000 feet of a building in which a polling place is located. [Sec. 61.004]
4. Bribing voters [Sec. 36.02, Penal Code];
5. Tampering with a direct recording electronic voting machine [Sec. 33.05, Penal Code];
6. Unlawfully influencing voters [Sec. 61.008];
7. Coercing voters [Sec. 36.03, Penal Code];
8. Unlawfully telling another person information that was obtained at the polling place about how a voter has voted [Sec. 61.006];
9. Unlawfully giving information about the status of the vote count or the names of people who have voted before the polls close [Sec. 61.007];
10. Tampering with voting equipment [Sec. 127.127];
11. Voting illegally [Sec. 64.012];
12. Unlawfully removing ballots from ballot box [Sec. 276.003];
13. Harassing the election officials [Sec. 32.075];
14. Unlawfully assisting voters [Sec. 64.036];
15. Unlawfully accepting or refusing to accept voters [Sec. 63.012];
16. Using a wireless communication device within 100 feet of polling place [Secs. 33.052(b) and 62.011];
17. Interfering with the voting process; and
18. Violating any other Texas election laws.

Persons allowed in the polling place:

Q. Who is allowed inside the polling place?

- A. 1. Election judge and clerks. [Secs. 32.071 & 32.072].
2. Poll watchers and Secretary of State inspectors. [Secs. 33.052 & 34.002].
3. Persons admitted to vote. [Sec. 63.001].
4. Children under 18 years old who are accompanying a parent who is admitted to vote. [Sec. 64.002(b)].
5. Persons providing assistance to or interpreting for a voter who is entitled to assistance or to an interpreter. [Secs. 61.032 & 64.032; 42 U.S.C. 197aa-6].
6. Federal inspectors appointed by the U.S. Department of Justice.
7. Persons summoned or appointed by the presiding election judge to act as special peace officers to preserve order. [Sec. 32.075].

8. Voting system technician on the request of the authority holding the election. [Sec. 125.010].

Provisional Voting:

Individuals who claim to be registered but whose names do not appear on the voter registration list or voters who are unable to produce their voter registration certificate or another form of required identification at the polling place are required to vote provisionally. Provisional ballots are not counted until the voter registrar and early voting ballot board verify the voter's eligibility. The affidavit which provisional voters must sign also acts as a voter registration application, ensuring that individuals, who are not actual registered voters, will be registered for future elections.

Q. Who is eligible to cast a provisional ballot?

A. The following individuals are eligible to cast a provisional ballot:

- An individual who claims to be properly registered and eligible to vote, but whose name does not appear on the list of registered voters and voter registrar cannot be reached or whose registration status cannot be confirmed by the voter registrar; or
- An individual who is not on the list and did not provide a certificate or other form of identification; or
- An individual who is registered to vote, but is trying to vote in a precinct other than the precinct where the voter is registered (on election day); or
- An individual who does not have his/her voter registration certificate and no form of identification; or
- An individual who has applied for a ballot by mail but has not returned the ballot or cancelled the ballot by mail with the early voting clerk or the ballot has not yet been counted by the ballot board; or
- An individual who is voting after 7:00 p.m. due to court order which extended voting hours; or
- An individual who is registered in the precinct but whose registered address is not located in the political subdivision conducting the election; or
- An individual who is attempting to vote in a primary election but has already participated in another party primary in the same election year.

Q. Who makes the determination if an individual is qualified to vote provisionally?

A. The election judge at the precinct makes that determination. If a voter is eligible to cast a provisional ballot, then the election judge immediately informs the voter of that right. In order to vote provisionally, the voter must complete and sign an "Affidavit of Provisional Voter," a form which will also serve as a voter registration application in the event the voter is not registered or as an update to the voter's registration record in the event the information is different.

Q. Are there cases when a provisional ballot will not be counted? When is a voter notified?

A. While a provisional voter may be allowed to vote at the polling place, there are certain circumstances in which they will immediately be informed that their ballot will not be counted. For example, the election judge will notify the voter that their ballot will not be counted if:

the ballot is cast at a precinct in which the voter is not registered (regardless of whether the voter is registered in another precinct in same political subdivision); or

- if the voter is required to present identification because of an “ID” notation next to their name but does not; [examples of acceptable forms of identification include: a driver’s license or state-issued ID card, birth certificate, passport, copy of current utility bill, bank statement or paycheck]; or
- the voter is attempting to vote in a primary election but has already voted in another party’s primary election.

Q. If a voter applied for a ballot by mail, may he vote provisionally at the election day precinct polling place without returning the mail ballot to the election judge?

- A. Yes. A voter who appears on the list of registered voters as having applied for and/or received a ballot by mail may go to the polling place and vote. If the voter does not have the ballot to return to the judge, he will have to vote a provisional ballot. If the mail ballot does not arrive at the ballot board before the provisional ballot, the provisional ballot will be counted. If the mail ballot does arrive at the ballot board before the provisional ballot, the mail ballot will be counted.

Q. How are provisional ballots reviewed and handled?

- A. At the polling place, the election judge provides the provisional voter written notice informing the voter that they will be notified within 10 days after the local canvass as to whether or not their ballot was counted and, if not, why it was not counted. The notice also includes instructions and additional details regarding the provisional voting process.

Q. How is the secrecy of the ballot preserved?

- A. The voter places the voted provisional ballot in a plain white secrecy envelope which in turn is placed inside the Provisional Affidavit Ballot Envelope. Provisional ballots are placed either in the general ballot box or in another designated, secure container until the voter registrar and early voting ballot board complete their review. The transfer and tabulation of these ballots are handled with the same care, secrecy and security as other ballots and voting system equipment. Note: If the voter is casting an electronic provisional ballot, the voter completes the affidavit on the provisional envelope but does not include a ballot.

Q. What is the deadline for reviewing provisional affidavits?

- A. The voter registrar has 3 business days to review the voter’s registration record. The early voting ballot board must complete the processing and counting, where applicable, of the provisional ballots by the seventh day after the election. Notice must be delivered to provisional voters regarding whether their ballot was counted, noting a reason, if their ballot was not counted. This notice must be delivered no later than the 10th day after the local canvass.

Using English and interpreters:

All election officials, while on duty at the polling place, must use English, except when helping a voter who does not understand English. [Sec. 61.031(a)].

Q. What is an interpreter and when is one used?

- A. 1. If a voter cannot communicate in English, an election official may communicate with the voter in a language both the election official and the voter (or voter’s interpreter) understands. [Sec. 61.031(b)].
2. An interpreter may be used when the voter and the election official(s) helping the voter cannot speak the same language. [Sec. 61.032].

3. Upon taking the oath of interpreter, any registered voter of the county may act as an interpreter for one or more voters. [Secs. 61.035 & 61.033].
4. The interpreter may be a person provided by the authority conducting the election. However, even if an interpreter is provided, a voter may use his own interpreter. [Sec. 61.032].
5. A watcher may request and receive an English translation of a language spoken other than English between an election official and a voter. [Sec. 61.036].

Casting the ballot:

Q. If voters make a mistake marking their ballot, can they start over?

A. Yes. Voters who make mistakes while marking their paper or optical scan ballots may take the spoiled ballot to an election official and exchange it for a new ballot. A voter may only receive up to two replacement ballots (the original ballot, plus two replacement ballots yields a total of three possible ballots per voter). [Sec. 64.007(a) & (b)].

Q: If a voter is voting provisionally on paper or optical scan ballot, does he or she use the same type of ballot as a regular voter?

A: Yes, but the election officials may have a few ballots pre-stamped “provisional” in a separate stack from regular ballots. The following steps must occur:

- (1) the voter votes the ballot;
- (2) seals the ballot in the privacy envelope;
- (3) seals the privacy envelope in the provisional ballot affidavit envelope; and
- (4) casts the ballot in the regular ballot box or other designated secured container as directed by the election officials.

NOTE: Some electronic voting systems allow the voter to cast a provisional ballot directly on the machine.

Q. If a voter leaves a voted ballot in the voting station or elsewhere in the polling place rather than putting it in the ballot box, or if a voter voting on an electronic voting system leaves without finally casting his or her ballot, is the ballot counted?

A. No. The ballot cast by a “fleeing” voter is not cast. The judge should treat it as a cancelled ballot. [65.010(a)(4)] On an electronic voting system, the ballot is cancelled.

Recount Watcher

Similarly to a poll watcher, a recount watcher (formerly termed a representative) is a person appointed to observe the conduct of the recount on behalf of:

- a candidate,
- a political party, or
- the proponents or opponents of a measure (specific-purpose political action committees). [Sec. 213.013].

Recount Watcher Qualifications

Unlike a poll watcher, a recount watcher is not required to meet any particular qualifications to serve. The recount watcher is not required to be a registered voter of the territory in which the election was held. The recount watcher does not have age or citizenship requirements. Public officials are not prohibited from serving as recount watchers, nor is the recount watcher’s

eligibility affected by the familial relationship of a watcher to a person serving on the recount committee.

Permitted Number of Recount Watchers

As the recount is conducted, each authority eligible to appoint a recount watcher is permitted to have watchers present in a number corresponding to the number of counting teams designated for the recount; however, if there is a single counting team, two recount watchers may be present. [Sec. 213.013(b)].

Recount Watcher Appointment

The watcher must deliver a certificate of appointment to the recount chair at the time the watcher reports for service. The certificate must be in writing and must contain:

- (1) the printed name and the signature of the recount watcher
- (2) the election subject to the recount
- (3) the time and place of the recount
- (4) the measure, candidate, or political party being represented
- (5) the signature and the printed name of the person making the appointment
- (6) an indication of the capacity in which the appointing authority is acting.

[Sec. 213.013(f)].

NEW LAW: Per House Bill 2817, 82nd Legislature, no one entitled to be present at a recount may possess a device capable of recording images or sound, unless the person agrees to disable or deactivate the device while present at the recount. [213.013(i)].

The officially prescribed recount watcher appointment form may be found at this link: <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/forms/pol-sub/14.f.pdf>

A recount watcher who submits a valid appointment form to the recount chair must be admitted to the recount unless the specific authority's maximum number of watchers have already been accepted. [Sec. 213.013(e)].

Recount Watcher's Duties

Similarly to a poll watcher, a recount watcher is entitled to observe any activity conducted in connection with the recount. Watchers are entitled to stand or sit conveniently near the officers engaged in the observed activity or near the officers counting or processing the ballots to verify that they are being counted correctly. Rules on the watcher's rights, duties, and privileges are otherwise the same as for a poll watcher to the extent applicable. [Sec. 213.013(h)].

Recount watchers may also be present in the same numbers prescribed under Section 213.013(b) to observe the printing of ballot images cast on direct recording electronic voting systems prior to the recount. [Sec. 213.016].

CONCLUSION

As a poll watcher or a recount watcher, you are entitled to observe the conduct of the election at the location to which you are assigned or the activities at a recount. Please remember, however, that the presiding officers are responsible for maintaining control and order. You should establish a cooperative relationship with these presiding officers and work with them to ensure that the voting process works smoothly.

If any questions arise during your service that the presiding officer cannot answer or you question the accuracy of the information provided, you may call the Elections Division at our toll-free number, 1-800-252-VOTE(8683). The Elections Division is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and during all uniform election dates from before the polls open until after they close. If you desire to learn more about the election process, please call our office to request one of our handbooks for election day officials and the early voting ballot board or our detailed recount procedures. You may also wish to review our online poll worker training at www.texaspollworkertraining.com.

Thank you for your participation in the election process!