

CITY OF FAIRBANKS

POLL WATCHERS GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been developed to familiarize poll watchers with relevant election laws and to define the responsibilities and limitations of a poll watcher.

The integrity of elections is a concern of all citizens. Although poll watchers may represent a particular candidate, political party, or civic organization, their principal interest is in the conduct of a fair and honest election. This handbook is an overview intended to help citizens understand the basic responsibilities of a poll watcher. Before assuming duties as a poll watcher, an individual should review this handbook to gain an understanding of polling place activities.

The right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy. It should be the objective of election officials and poll watchers to protect voter rights.

If you have questions regarding the City of Fairbanks election process, please contact the City Clerk at 907-459-6774.

BECOMING A POLL WATCHER

Appointment

One person at a time may be appointed as a poll watcher at each City precinct for any election. Poll watchers must be citizens of the United States and reside within the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Poll watchers must be designated by candidates or an organized group that sponsors or opposes a proposition.

Request for Authorization

A person wishing to serve as a poll watcher must request authorization from the City Clerk no later than 5:00 p.m. the Tuesday prior to the election. The request will be made upon a form provided by the City Clerk and must include:

- the name of the person to act as a poll watcher;
- the name, address and contact information of the candidate, group, or organization the poll watcher is representing;
- the date of the election; and
- the precinct the poll watcher wishes to observe.

Poll Watcher Training

Training will be provided to poll watchers to include an overview of this handbook. A copy of the Polling Place Election Procedures will be provided to each poll watcher.

Identification of Poll Watchers

When reporting to a precinct location, poll watchers are required to present written proof from the City Clerk that they are an authorized poll watcher. A poll watcher identification badge issued by the City Clerk may serve as written proof of this authorization.

To be valid, the poll watcher identification badge must indicate:

- the poll watcher's printed name on the front of the badge;
- the title "Poll Watcher" clearly printed on the front of the badge;
- *the election date and precinct;
- *the name of the candidate or organized group the poll watcher is representing; and
- the signature of the City Clerk.

*This information is listed on the back of the poll watcher identification badge and cannot be exhibited to voters as it would be considered electioneering. The back side of the badge is to be viewed only by the election board when the poll watcher arrives.

Without proper identification, a poll watcher will be asked to leave the polling place.

PERSONS AUTHORIZED IN THE POLLING PLACE

Election Board Members

In each precinct, an election board is appointed to conduct the election, and each board is comprised of at least three election officials. An election official must be a citizen of the United States and a registered voter in the City of Fairbanks. One election official is appointed as a chairperson and is primarily responsible for the administration of the election in the precinct. In some precincts a second worker is appointed as a co-chairperson.

All election officials have equal authority. They conduct the election, administer voting procedures, determine voter qualifications, and maintain the decorum of the polling place. By majority decision, election officials determine the action required on any questions that arise during the election.

All persons present in the polling place or within 200 feet of any entrance to the polling place must obey the lawful orders of election officials. **Only election officials may handle election supplies, equipment, and materials.**

Poll Watchers

There can be only one poll watcher representing each candidate or organized group in the polling place at a time.

Candidates may serve as poll watchers; however, they must have proper poll watcher credentials to remain in the polling place.

Poll watchers have no duties in the conduct of the election.

Others

Other people allowed to remain in the polling place are City or Borough Clerk's Office staff and voters (while voting).

PRIVILEGES AND CONDUCT OF POLL WATCHERS

Privileges and Conduct of Poll Watchers

Poll watchers must produce identification badges upon the request of election officials and must have identification badges attached to their person and visible to the public at all times while in the polling place. Election officials must ensure that poll watchers have a complete view of the election process. **Poll watchers may not sit or stand in the area behind the election table where election officials are working or in between workers handling precinct registers. Poll watchers must remain a distance away from voting machines and voting booths to ensure the secrecy of ballots.** Poll watchers may be in close enough proximity to hear and record the name of a voter. Poll watchers may check voting booths after voters exit to ensure that campaign materials have not been left behind.

It is important for each poll watcher to acknowledge that election officials are diligent citizens doing an important job that requires long hours of hard work. A poll watcher should establish a cooperative relationship with election officials to best facilitate the election process.

Only one poll watcher for each candidate or organized group may be present in the polling place at a time.

A poll watcher who violates any regulation adopted by the City Clerk will be asked to surrender their badge and leave the polling place.

Poll Watcher Interference

Poll watchers may not interfere with the election process and may not handle any election equipment, supplies, or materials, including the precinct register.

Poll watchers may not campaign or try to persuade voters to vote a certain way inside the polling place or within 200 feet of any entrance to the polling place.

A poll watcher who creates a public disturbance may be removed from the polling place.

THE POLL WATCHER'S ROLE

Before the Polls Open

Poll watchers may observe the set-up procedures and check that the ballot box is empty before the polls open. They may closely observe the election judges as official ballots are prepared for distribution.

During Voting Hours

Poll watchers may observe the general conduct of the election throughout election day.

When a voter enters the polling place, an election official will ask for the voter's name and identification. **The ID requirement may be waived if an election official personally knows the voter, except when "Must Show ID" is printed in the signature block above the voter's name in the register. In such cases, the voter must present identification in order to sign the register.** If a voter does not have identification and is not personally known by the election official, the voter must vote a questioned ballot.

Before issuing ballots, the election official will ask voters to sign their name on the precinct register. Voters who have difficulty signing their name may make a mark or an "X" in the signature space.

Poll watchers may not closely observe signatures in the precinct register.

Campaigning

Campaigning is an act meant to persuade voters to vote in a particular way. **It is against the law for campaigning to take place within 200 feet of any entrance to a polling place.**

Campaigning includes the following:

- discussion of a candidate or ballot proposition on the ballot;
- displaying a campaign sign or vehicle bumper sticker;
- wearing campaign clothing, buttons, pins, hats, etc; and
- displaying marked sample ballots or election pamphlets.

A voter may bring along, for personal use, notes and reminders such as a pre-marked sample ballot or an official election pamphlet. A voter may take these items into a voting booth but may not display the items for others to see. Materials left behind by voters should be disposed of immediately.

It is the duty of election officials to prohibit campaigning at polling places. Election officials may not discuss any political party, candidate, or ballot proposition while on duty. Election officials

may not inform a voter or anyone else that a person is a candidate for a specific race.

Poll watchers may not campaign while poll watching at a polling place. Any campaigning observed by the poll watcher should be reported immediately to an election official or to the City Clerk.

After Polls Close

Poll watchers may remain in the polling place until closing procedures are completed.

Poll watchers may request the election board to print an additional copy of the unofficial voting results tape for the precinct.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO VOTERS

Providing Assistance

Voters who have difficulty because of a disability, who do not speak English, or who cannot read or write may receive assistance when voting. Help may be provided by an election official or anyone who is not a candidate for office.

If a person other than an election official assists the voter, the person must take a verbal oath not to divulge how the voter voted. The person providing assistance may accompany the voter into the voting booth. The person providing assistance may read the ballot to the voter and may mark the voter's ballot according to the voter's preference. The person may complete any form for the voter except that the person cannot sign forms requiring the voter's signature.

Voter Instructions

It may be necessary for an election board member to explain to the voter, in full view of everyone in the polling place, how to properly cast a ballot. To the extent possible, instructions are given by posting informative and pictorial signs in the polling place and in each voting booth.

Instructions, if necessary, should be given before the voter enters the voting booth.

A POLL WATCHER'S COMPLAINT

Poll Watcher's Complaint

If a poll watcher observes an administrative error or irregularity caused by an election official, the poll watcher should call it to the precinct chairperson's attention. If the election officials fail to correct the error or refuse to follow proper procedures, the poll watcher should contact the City Clerk. Election officials may be removed for misbehavior or neglect of duty.

Poll watcher complaints should be submitted to the City Clerk in writing using the attached "Poll Watcher's Complaint Form."

Poll Watcher's Complaint Form

Name of Poll Watcher: _____

Representative of:

☐ City Candidate: _____

☐ Organized Group: _____

Voting Location: _____
Precinct Name Precinct Number

Nature of Complaint:

Disposition of Complaint (if unresolved by election board):

☐ Referred to City Clerk

Name(s) of election officials:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Name, address, phone number, and email of witness (if any; attach more if necessary):

Witness Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Poll Watcher's Signature: _____