



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Elections Division

## Election Advisory #24-01

Tallying & Certifying Presidential Primary Votes

February 22, 2024

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Poll workers and clerks often find that tallying votes for the Presidential Primaries is more complicated than in other elections, due to the number of candidates and write-in spaces listed on the ballot. This Advisory will provide information and reminders about how to tally, report, and certify these election results.

### Tallying Presidential Preference Results

Tallying results for Presidential Preference is similar to tallying offices on other types of ballots. The main difference is the option for a voter to select “No Preference” on the ballot. These votes are not blanks – they are counted separately and reported just as if “No Preference” were another candidate.

When certifying results, you will have results for:

- Each candidate
- No Preference
- Write-ins (of a significant number)
- All Others
- Blanks

### Write-in Votes

Write-in votes should be reported separately from “All Others” if they are known write-in candidates or candidates of that party who received a significant number of votes.

- Votes for fictional people, deceased persons, or phrases should be tallied as **Blanks**.
- Votes for candidates without a significant number of votes should be grouped under **All Others**.
- Votes for candidates enrolled in a different political party should be grouped under **All Others**.
- Votes for candidates already printed on the ballot for that office should be tallied as **Blanks**.

Write-in votes for “Mickey Mouse,” “Abraham Lincoln,” “Ceasefire,” or other similar characters, deceased people, or phrases should be tallied as blanks.

For presidential preference, if a voter votes for both “no preference” and for a write-in candidate, the vote must be counted for the write-in candidate. If the voter votes for both “no preference” and a candidate listed on the ballot, it is an overvote, which is tallied as a blank.

A write-in vote on a primary ballot is a vote for that candidate to receive that party's nomination. It is not combined with write-in votes for the same candidate on a different party's ballot.

- For example, if a voter writes in Donald Trump's name on the Democratic ballot, it must be recorded as a vote for Donald Trump to be the Democratic nominee.

Write-in votes are only for candidates *who are NOT printed on the ballot* for that office. If someone writes in the name of a candidate already printed on the same ballot for that office, it must be tallied as a blank.

- For instance, a write-in vote for Joseph R. Biden on the Democratic ballot should be counted as a blank.

As always, write-in votes for a candidate should be counted if you can determine the voter's intent.

Count a write-in vote even if:

- The name is misspelled
- The voter didn't include an address
- The voter didn't fill in the vote indicator next to the write-in space (for scanned ballots)

If you cannot determine the voter's intent, you must tally the vote as a blank.

For scanned ballots, instruct your poll workers to go through all of the ballots to find write-in votes, even if the ballot box has a diverter to sort write-ins into a separate compartment. Ballots will not be segregated into a write-in compartment if the voter did not fill in the bubble next to the write-in space, but these votes should still be counted.

If the voter did not fill in the oval next to the write-in space, the tabulator will count it as a blank even if the voter wrote in the name of a candidate. After the poll workers add the write-in vote to the tally sheet, they will also need to subtract a vote from the blanks.

- We are aware of only one write-in candidate for President at this time: Cenk Uyger in the Democratic Primary.

## Tallying State Committee Results

Candidates for State Committee Man and State Committee Woman run in each State Senate District. One person may be elected to each seat.

Write-in candidates for state committee need at least 50 votes districtwide (and more votes than any other candidate) in order to be elected.

A candidate who wins enough votes to be elected must also meet the party enrollment requirements. They must have been enrolled in their party since at least August 23, 2023. They can also not have been enrolled in any other party since November 21, 2022. If they do not meet the enrollment requirements, they cannot be declared elected and the next highest vote getter is elected. Certificates of election for State Committee candidates are issued by the Elections Division.

- **Note:** in the Third Essex District, the Democratic nominee for State Committee Woman, Laura Ellen Walsh, passed away after ballots were printed. Votes for Walsh must be tallied as **Blanks**.

## Known Write-In Candidates

Hampshire, Franklin & Worcester District:

- Democratic State Committee Man -- James (Jim) Nash, 18 Montview Avenue, Northampton
- Democratic State Committee Woman -- Samantha (Sam) Hopper, 48 Pioneer Knolls, Northampton

## Tallying Ward & Town Committee Results

Tallying results for ward and town committee is often the most time-consuming portion of Election Night. For ward and town committee, candidates can run as a “group,” and voters have the option of filling in the “Group” oval at the top of the candidates, which will be tallied as 1 vote for each member of the group.

For ward and town committee, write-in spaces are only provided if there are fewer candidates running than there are seats to be elected. The instructions you give to poll workers will depend largely on what your ballot looks like. Below are some common scenarios with ward and town committee candidates.

***Scenario 1:*** 35 members to be elected, 35 candidates listed on the ballot.

In this case, there are no write-in spaces provided, and no write-in votes can be tallied.

***Scenario 2:*** 35 members to be elected, 0 candidates listed on the ballot.

In this case, all votes will be either blanks or write-ins. If a voter writes in 3 people and leaves the remainder blank, the poll workers should tally the 3 write-in votes and record 32 blanks for that ballot.

***Scenario 3:*** 35 members to be elected, 20 candidates listed on the ballot.

In this case, there will be 20 candidates listed on the ballot, followed by 15 write-in spaces. If the voter fills in the group option at the top of the ballot, that applies 1 vote for each of the 20 listed candidates. If they then write-in 5 more candidates and leave the rest of the write-in spaces blank, this would be tallied as:

- 20 votes on the tape (1 for each candidate)
- 5 write-in votes
- 10 blanks

***Scenario 4:*** 35 members to be elected, two competing slates (one group of 30, one group of 20).

In this case, a voter may fill in one Group option, but not both. Filling in Group 1 and Group 2 would result in 50 votes being cast, which is an overvote and must be counted as 35 blanks. The voter may select any number of voters up to the maximum of 35, and a mixture of members from each slate may end up being elected.

***Scenario 5:*** 35 candidates listed, voter fills in Group option and then fills in ovals next to 10 candidates listed as part of the group.

In this case, the Group voting option overrides individual votes within the group. This will be counted as 35 votes (1 for each candidate listed).

## Certificates of Election

After certifying election results, you will also need to determine which candidates have been elected to your local ward and town committee, to issue certificates of election to those candidates.

If a candidate's name was printed on the ballot, they must be among the top vote-getters to be elected. For instance, if 20 candidates were to be elected, the candidate must have been among the top 20 candidates for you to issue a certificate of election.

In order to have been elected to a ward or town committee, a **write-in candidate must have:**

- Been among the top vote-getters
- Received at least 5 write-in votes
- Been enrolled in the appropriate party since August 23, 2023
  - If the candidate registered to vote in Massachusetts after August 23<sup>rd</sup>, they need to have been enrolled in the appropriate party since the day they registered.
  - They also cannot have been enrolled in any other party since November 21, 2022.

Before you issue certificates of election to any write-in candidates for ward or town committee, you will need to confirm their party enrollment and review their party change history to confirm they meet the party enrollment requirements.

### **Certifying Results**

The deadline to complete certification of results for the March 5, 2024 Presidential Primaries is **Saturday, March 9, 2024**. You must enter results for Presidential Preference and State Committee into VRIS and mail the certified Returns of Votes to:

Elections Division  
Secretary of the Commonwealth  
One Ashburton Place, Room 1705  
Boston, MA 02108

- **Note:** 3 separate Returns of Votes will need to be signed and mailed – one for each party.

Unlike Presidential Preference and State Committee results, results for ward and town committee are NOT certified to the Secretary of the Commonwealth. You must instead send certified election results for ward or town committee to:

- The chair of the appropriate ward or town committee (if any)
- The chair of the appropriate state party committee

The mailing addresses for the state party committees are:

**Democratic State Committee**

11 Beacon St., #410  
Boston, MA 02108

**Republican State Committee**

85 Merrimac St., #505  
Boston, MA 02114

**Libertarian State Committee**

P.O. Box 787  
Framingham, MA 01701