How to Run for President in Massachusetts

Election 2020

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Secretary of the Commonwealth

updated 1/10/19
Qualifications
The qualifications for President of the United States are set forth in the U.S. Constitution. A candidate for president must be 35 years old, a natural born citizen of the United States, and must have been a resident of the United States for at least 14 years. There are two ways to run as a candidate in Massachusetts: as a party candidate in the presidential primary or as a non-party candidate directly in the November election.

Presidential Primary
Party candidates for president may run in the presidential primary. The Massachusetts Presidential Preference Primary will be held on Tuesday, March 3, 2020. M.G.L. Ch.53 §28. At the presidential primary, voters will select the candidate of their preference to represent a party for president at the November 3, 2020 presidential election.

There are three ways for the names of presidential candidates to be placed on the presidential primary ballot:

1. Candidates may file nomination papers with at least 2,500 certified signatures. For primary ballot placement, signatures of at least 2,500 voters must be certified by local election officials and subsequently filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

2. The chair of each party’s state committee may designate names to be listed. The presidential primary ballot also includes a “No Preference” choice and a write-in space to indicate presidential preference. M.G.L. Ch.53 §70E.

3. The Secretary of the Commonwealth may place candidates on the ballot who have been generally advocated or recognized in the national news media.

General Election
In November, non-party candidates may run in the State Election under a political designation (of up to three words) or without any designation. Such candidates are listed on the State Election ballot, alongside nominees chosen by the political parties.

Non-party candidates must circulate nomination papers to have their names placed on the ballot. Nomination papers for president and vice president will be released with other State Election nomination papers, no later than February 12, 2020. Non-party candidates should consult
the Elections Division’s publication, “How to Run for Office,” for more information on nomination paper deadlines.

A non-party candidate seeking to have his or her name placed on the ballot must obtain at least 10,000 certified signatures on nomination papers. These papers must include the names presidential and vice presidential candidates, as well as the eleven elector candidates (who must be registered voters in Massachusetts). Although only the names of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates appear on the ballot, voters cast their ballots for the electors who cast their votes in the Electoral College.

Write-in candidates may also run, but only if their names and their slate of elector candidates have been filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth by 5 p.m. on September 4, 2020.

**Electoral College**

When voters cast their votes for president and vice-president, they are actually voting for electors who will cast their votes in the Electoral College. The Constitution requires that each state appoint “a number of electors equal to the whole number of senators and representatives to which the state may be entitled in the Congress.” With two Senators and 9 Representatives in Congress, Massachusetts has a total of eleven of the 538 members of the Electoral College.

Although the number of electors is determined by the Constitution, each state has been delegated the right to choose the method of selecting them. United States senators and representatives and any person “holding an office of trust or profit under the United States” are prohibited from being electors by the Constitution.

**Selection of Electors in Massachusetts**

Massachusetts elector candidates must be registered voters of the Commonwealth. They pledge to vote for their party’s nominees or for those candidates on whose nomination papers their names were listed. Their names must be filed according to the following guidelines:

- The state committees of the respective political parties select their presidential electors. These names, with written acceptances and their pledges to vote for the candidates named in the filing, must be filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth by the September 8, 2020. M.G.L. Ch.53 §8.
• **For elector candidates pledged to non-party candidates:**
The nomination papers for non-party candidates for president have spaces for the names and addresses of the candidates for president, vice-president, and their eleven elector candidates. Elector candidates pledged to non-party candidates cannot have been enrolled in the Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, or Green-Rainbow Party on or after March 4, 2020. M.G.L. Ch.53 §§6, 9. This means that non-party electors must unenroll from any recognized political party by March 3, 2020.

• The filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth for nomination papers for elector candidates pledged to non-party candidates is no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 25, 2020.

• **For elector candidates pledged to write-in or sticker candidates:**
Write-in or sticker candidates for president and vice-president select their own elector candidates. These eleven names, with the written acceptance of the elector candidates, are filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth at least 60 days before the date of the election. M.G.L. Ch. 54 §78A.

**Electoral College Proceedings**
The electors whose presidential and vice-presidential candidates received the plurality of the votes in Massachusetts meet at the State House on Monday, December 14, 2020. After they are sworn in by the Governor and choose a presiding officer and secretary, each elector casts a separate ballot for president and vice president. These votes, cast on the same day in each of the states, are transmitted to both houses of Congress between January 3rd and January 20th. The candidates receiving an absolute majority (270) of the electoral votes are declared President and Vice President of the United States.

Should no candidates receive at least 270 votes in the Electoral College, the president shall be chosen by the House of Representatives and the vice president by the Senate. The House of Representatives shall choose from among the three candidates with the highest number of votes, with each state’s delegation casting one vote. Each senator shall cast a single vote for vice president. In such a situation, a simple majority shall be necessary to elect both the president and vice president.
### Calendar of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Deadline Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nomination papers available for presidential candidates.</td>
<td>Tuesday, September 24, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour to submit presidential candidates’ nomination papers to local registrars of voters and election commissioners for certification of signatures.</strong></td>
<td>Friday, December 20, 2019</td>
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<td>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour for registrars to complete certification of signatures for presidential candidates.</td>
<td>Friday, December 27, 2019</td>
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<td>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour for presidential candidates to apply to registrars of voters for review of non-certified signatures.</td>
<td>Monday, December 30, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour for registrars to complete review of non-certified signatures.</td>
<td>Thursday, January 2, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour to file presidential candidates’ nomination papers with the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.</strong></td>
<td>Friday, January 3, 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour to file objections to presidential candidates’ nomination papers with the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.</td>
<td>Thursday, January 8, 2020</td>
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<td>5:00 p.m. - Last day and hour for presidential candidates to file affidavits of withdrawal with the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.</td>
<td>Friday, January 10, 2020</td>
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<td>Last day for voters to register to vote or change party enrollment for the Presidential Primary. Registration sessions are held from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (except in towns having less than 1,500 voters, where registration sessions must be held from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.)</td>
<td>Wednesday, February 12, 2020</td>
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<td><strong>PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY</strong></td>
<td>Tuesday, March 3, 2020</td>
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**NOTE:** These dates and/or requirements are subject to change if new laws are enacted by the General Court.