



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Elections Division

## Election Advisory #20-05

Designating Polling Places and Confirming Election Workers

October 2, 2020

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Under the laws of the Commonwealth, each precinct in Massachusetts must have a designated polling place. There are certain requirements and procedures for designating polling places, which have been changed for the upcoming election.

### **DESIGNATING POLLING PLACES: NEW REQUIREMENTS:**

Pursuant to Section 11 of Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020, there are new procedures required when moving polling locations. These procedures apply to any polling place changes occurring on or after July 6, 2020.

That section states:

SECTION 11. Notwithstanding section 24 of chapter 54 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, the select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council may, by recorded and public vote, change any polling place to be used at the primary election or the general election at least 20 days prior to the date of the primary election or general election if it is determined that the public convenience or public health would be better served.

If the select board, board of selectmen or town council determines that the public convenience or public health would be better served, they may house all polling places in a single building within the municipality, if such building is suitably equipped; provided, however, that alcoholic beverages shall not be served or consumed in that portion of a building used as a polling place, during voting hours or while ballots are being counted therein.

In cities, the city council may designate polling places in non-adjacent precincts if they determine the public convenience or public health would be better served.

In making a decision to change a polling place, the select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council shall evaluate and report on whether such change would have a disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age, and not later than 3 days prior to changing a polling place, shall make publicly available on its website and at the office of the town or city clerk a report on its evaluation.

When the polling places have been designated pursuant to this section, the board of registrars shall post on the municipal website and at other such places as it may determine, a description of the polling places and shall notify voters by using an electronic means, to the extent available, such as via email or reverse 911 call.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLLING PLACES:**

Whether designating a new location or evaluating an existing location this year, additional factors must be considered. These include available space, accessibility of such space, and additional requirements set forth in Election Advisory 20-03 Regarding Health & Safety Guidelines for Conducting Voting in Person (August 20, 2020).

**Accessibility:** When evaluating any new polling place, that location must be reviewed for accessibility. A Polling Place Accessibility Survey must be completed to ensure the location is fully accessible for all voters. Upon completion of accessibility survey, please email the completed survey and accompanying photos to [bridget.murphy@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:bridget.murphy@sec.state.ma.us).

**Public Convenience:** All new proposed locations must also be evaluated for public convenience and public health, as well as whether the new location would have a disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age.

**Space:** All voting sites must be configured to support and encourage social distancing, minimize the risk to the safety and health of all persons using or working at the site, and comply with all applicable regulations and public health guidelines.

Locations should be reviewed for possible changes to the layout of the voting area which may require larger spaces. Site layouts should adhere to the following requirements:

- Voting booths and/or other privacy screens must be spread out within the voting site, at least six (6) feet apart;
- Paths of travel for voters arriving and those leaving should not cross;
- Check-in tables should be placed as near to the entrance to the voting site as possible without presenting a safety risk to workers or voters;
- Check-out tables, if their use is not being waived by the local election official, should be placed as near to the exit of the voting site as possible without presenting a safety risk to workers or voters;
- Tabulators or other permitted ballot boxes should be placed as near to the exit of the voting site as possible and must be positioned to ensure voters need not pass by voters who are entering the voting site;

- AutoMARK machines must be placed as normal, provided that an additional three (3) feet of empty space must be provided on all sides of the machine, except those sides which directly adjoin a wall or physical barrier, and that the AutoMARK is immediately and directly accessible from the entrance to the voting site;
- Physical barriers or partitions such as acrylic, plexiglass or other materials that separate airspace should be used to provide additional safe guards and prevent exchange of air between individuals at locations such as check-in and, if applicable, check-out tables;

With these additional requirements for health and safety, a space that may have been adequate last year may not be sufficient for the upcoming election. The number of voters who vote in-person for the presidential election will be far greater than the State Primary. Accordingly, with higher numbers of voters voting in polling places for November 3<sup>rd</sup>, extra space is necessary to ensure voters can safely vote in a timely and efficient manner.

**Reporting:** After you complete an accessibility survey and evaluation, the information must be compiled into a report. This report must be posted on the municipality's website and in the clerk's office at least 3 days before the date set for the local select board, board of selectmen, or town/city council publicly to meet to review and vote on the move to the new proposed polling place.

**Notice:** When the polling places have been designated, the board of registrars shall post on the municipal website and at other such places as it may determine, a description of the polling places and shall notify voters by using an electronic means, to the extent available, such as via email or reverse 911 call.

The new polling place must be updated in VRIS as soon as possible to ensure notices print correctly and our website displays accurate information. We further recommend posting notices on the old location for voters who may go to the previous location on Election Day.

It is important that you keep us informed. We want to make sure that our polling places are accessible, safe, and able to process voters in a timely fashion on Election Day.

**Alternate Locations:** We strongly recommend that each municipality identify in advance and keep a list of accessible back-up polling places to be used in the event a designated location becomes unavailable before the election. These locations should be approved by the appropriate deadline by the designating authority so there is agreement to use such locations if necessary.

**DEADLINE TO DESIGNATE POLLING PLACES:**

The deadline to make changes to polling places to be used for the November 3, 2020 State Election is Wednesday, October 14, 2020.

**CONFIRMING ELECTION WORKERS:**

Local election officials should be confirming election workers for early voting and for November 3, 2020.

Each precinct should have a warden, clerk, and four inspectors (if you are using a check-out table). Two inspectors are assigned to the check-in table and two inspectors are assigned to the check-out table.

Even if the check-out table is not being utilized, an election worker must still be assigned to supervise the ballot box or tabulator.

Please plan to have additional election workers in the polling place on Election Day as well. These additional election workers can assist the warden when directed to fill-in for inspectors, helpful in directing voters through the socially distanced polling place, and also ensure the polling place surfaces are regularly cleaned and sanitized. Each municipality should have a pool of additional workers to cover any poll workers who are unable to work during early voting or on Election Day.

**QUESTIONS?**

Contact the Elections Division at 617-727-2828 or [elections@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:elections@sec.state.ma.us).