



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Elections Division

## Election Advisory #24-07

Tallying & Certifying State Election Votes

October 22, 2024

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This Advisory will provide information about tallying, reporting, and certifying State Election results.

### Tallying State Election Results at the Polls

All ballots must be counted at the polling place except:

- Early/absentee ballots counted at a Central Tabulation Facility (CTF) or advance processing location
- Ballots returned electronically from UOCAVA voters or voters with disabilities
- Provisional Ballots
- FWABs
- Ballots counted during post-election tabulation as described in *Election Advisory 24-06: Post-Election Tabulation*.

All ballots must be counted in public view, but the tallies must be clearly identified as unofficial.

### Hand-Counted Paper Ballots

Ballots must be counted by teams. One poll worker must read the name of the office and whom the vote is for, while the other records the votes on the tally sheet. The reader must state “blank” if the voter did not mark a vote for a candidate.

Only red pens or pencils should be used to mark the tally sheet. Once ballots are counted for each precinct, the results must be read aloud, but it should be announced that they are unofficial results.

### Scanner Ballots

Election officers must print the tape from the machine and read the tape totals after stating the totals are unofficial results only. If ballots were counted elsewhere, such as a CTF, the poll worker should state that the results do not include all results for the precinct. A copy of the tape should be posted outside the guardrail for inspection, while another copy is used for tallying.

When emptying the ballot box, poll workers must look through all ballots for write-in votes, including those not segregated into a write-in compartment.

Ballots in the auxiliary bin (those not read by the machine) must be fully hand-counted for each office. For ballots that were read by the tabulator and contain write-in votes, only the office(s) with the write-in votes are hand-counted.

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## Marking the Tally Sheet

Where scanner ballots are used, election officials must record the totals from the results tape on a precinct master tally sheet. The results must include all votes for each candidate, write-ins, and blanks.

Election workers must also tally any ballots in the auxiliary compartment, in the same manner as hand-counted paper ballots are counted (see above). These are marked on a hand-count tally sheet and added to the totals on the master tally sheet.

- All write-in votes must be tallied in the polling places on Election Night and then sealed. They cannot be counted the next day, or in the clerk's office.

After poll workers have completed their tally, they must seal the tally sheets and return them to your office. Tally sheets must be sealed separately from the cast ballots.

## Missing Ballot Cards

If you have multiple cards for your ballot, some vote by mail and absentee ballots may be returned without all of the ballot cards. If a card is missing, a blank will have to be added for each of the races or questions on the missing card.

## Tallying Write-In Results

When reporting results, you will have results for:

- Each candidate
- Write-ins
- All Others
- Blanks

Write-in votes should be reported on precinct tally sheets from poll workers separately from "All Others." Any known write-in candidates should be listed on the tally sheet for use at the precinct.

- Votes for fictional people, deceased persons, or phrases should be tallied as **Blanks**.
- 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.

Write-in votes can only be counted 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 U.S. Senate for Elizabeth Warren 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, poll workers must 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 oval 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. After the poll workers add the write-in vote to the tally sheet, they will also need to subtract a vote from the blanks.

### **Presidential Write-Ins**

For the office of Electors of President and Vice-President, candidates must have filed certain paperwork with the Elections Division to be counted. Below is a list of certified candidates for the office of Electors for President and Vice-President:

- Chisholm and Quarles, Independent
- Descoteaux and Lytle, Unenrolled
- Sonski and Onak, American Solidarity
- West and Abdullah, Independent

You should prepare a tally sheet for each precinct that contains these names for your poll workers. Only one of the names of the President or Vice-President candidates needs to be written on the ballot for the vote to be counted.

The above write-ins are the ONLY write-ins that can be tallied for the office of Electors for President and Vice-President. Do NOT tally any other write-in candidates for this office.

- If the write-in is a real person, group with “All Others.”
- If the write-in is a fictitious or deceased person, count as “Blank.”

### **Known Write-In Candidates**

This office is aware of the following write-in candidates:

- Sana Fadel – 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District
- Sarah G. Hewins – 2<sup>nd</sup> Plymouth Representative District

The above list is not necessarily comprehensive. Some candidates may notify you directly. If this office is notified of additional names as we approach Election Day, we will send an updated list.

The names of any known write-ins should be included on the precinct tally sheets you send to the polls to make it easier for poll workers. Poll workers should be specifically trained on how to count write-ins; the standard used is the intent of the voter.

- For example, if the known write-in candidate’s name is Robert Kraft and the voter writes “Bob Kraft,” it should still be attributed to the known write-in.

## **Certifying Results**

The deadline to complete certification of results for the November 5, 2024 State Election is **Wednesday, November 20, 2024**. Results must be entered into VRIS and the certified Returns of Votes mailed to:

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