



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Elections Division

Election Advisory #26-03

Tallying & Certifying State Primary Votes

August 20, 2026

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

Tallying State Primary Results at the Polls

All ballots must be counted at the polling place except:

- Early and absentee ballots counted at a Central Tabulation Facility (CTF) or advance processing location
- Early and absentee ballots received too late to be sent to the polling place
- Ballots returned electronically from UOCAVA voters or voters with disabilities.

All ballots must be counted in public view.

Hand-Counted Paper Ballots

Ballots must first be separated by party and then 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.

- When reading unofficial totals, the election officer should announce that the results are unofficial, and do not include hand-counted ballots. If ballots were counted elsewhere (such as a CTF), they should also state that these results do not include all results for the precinct.

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A copy of the tape must be posted outside the guardrail for public inspection, while another copy is used for tallying.

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

- Remind poll workers to inspect all ballots not in the write-in compartment for any write-ins!

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.

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.

After poll workers have finished hand-counting ballots in the auxiliary compartment, they should proceed to tallying write-ins, as further detailed in the next section. Poll workers should include on the tally sheet the total number of write-ins for each office, recorded separately on the write-in tally sheet.

- All write-in votes and ballots in the auxiliary compartment must be tallied in the polling places on Election Night and then sealed. They cannot be counted back at the local election office or the next day.

After all votes have been tallied, the total number of votes, including write-ins and blanks, must add up to the same number for every office. This number should match the total number of ballots cast.

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

Tallying Write-In Results

When reporting results, you must report results for:

- Each candidate

- Write-ins
- All Others
- Blanks

You must supply your poll workers with separate write-in tally sheets for each party, marked with the party name and the ward/precinct. Each office should be included on the tally sheet, and any known write-ins for that office should be pre-filled.

Poll workers should be instructed to:

- Record the names and votes for **ALL WRITE-INS**, regardless of the number received or whether they are a known write-in.
- Where there are variations in names, and poll workers are unsure of whether to count the vote for a known write-in candidate, record the name on the tally sheet exactly as it appears on the ballot, so that you as the local election official can make the determination about how to categorize the votes.
- Record each vote under the **office** and **party** for under which it was written.
 - Make sure poll workers know that votes on separate party ballots **cannot be combined**. They must be tallied separately by party.
 - Make sure poll workers understand that they must tally a vote for the office under which it was written, even if the candidate is understood to be seeking a different office.
- Tally votes for fictional people, deceased persons, or phrases as **Blanks**.
 - For example, “Mickey Mouse,” “Abraham Lincoln,” “No war,” “None of the Above,” etc. are not people and therefore should be tallied as blanks.
- Tally votes for candidates already printed on that ballot **for that office** as **Blanks**.
 - If the candidate is printed on the ballot immediately above the write-in space (not for a different office or party), it should be counted as a **Blank**.

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

- For example, if a voter writes in Maura Healey’s name on the Republican ballot under the office of Governor, it must be recorded as a vote for Maura Healey to be the Republican nominee for Governor.

Similarly, the vote counts for the office under which it is written, regardless of what the candidate has declared for.

- For example, if a voter writes-in Anne Manning Martin for Governor on the Republican ballot, it must be recorded as a vote for Anne Manning Martin to be the Republican

nominee for Governor, even though she is understood to be running for Lieutenant Governor.

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 Governor for Maura Healey on the Democratic ballot should be counted as a blank.

Intent of the Voter

While state law contemplates including the name and address of the candidate, the standard used by the courts is voter intent. In other words, write-in votes for a candidate should be counted if you can reasonably determine the voter's intent.

After tally sheets are returned to your office, you determine which votes should be grouped under a specific write-in candidate and which will be categorized under "All Others" or Blanks.

When reviewing tally sheets, you should count write-in votes even if:

- The name is misspelled
- The voter didn't include an address
- A common or known nickname is used
 - For example, if the known write-in candidate's name is Robert Kraft and the voter writes "Bob Kraft," you can reasonably determine the voter's intent and the vote should be attributed to the known write-in candidate.
- The voter wrote only first initial and last name (as long as there are no other known write-in candidates with the same first initial and last name)

In general, you should count a write-in vote as a Blank if you cannot determine the voter's intent. Examples include:

- A write-in vote that includes only a first name
- The voter wrote only initials (unless the candidate is widely known by them, like JFK)

When completing your official results, you may group write-in votes under "All Others" when you are able to discern the name that the voter wrote, but the name is not a known write-in candidate AND the person received very few votes. **Do not report any known write-in candidates under "All Others."**

Adjusting Tally Sheets

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.

- For example, the tabulator counted 25 write-in votes and 105 blanks for state representative, but the poll workers found 5 write-in votes for state representative in the main compartment, without the ovals filled in. Those 5 votes must be added to the write-in tally sheet, and the master tally sheet must be adjusted to show that there are 30 write-in votes and 100 blanks.

Minimum Votes to be Nominated

Enrollment requirements do not apply to write-in candidates. A write-in candidate may receive the nomination of any party, as long as they receive enough votes to be nominated.

In a primary election, a candidate must receive at least the number of votes equal to the number of signatures needed to have their name printed on the ballot, plus more votes than any other candidate for that office.

- For example, a successful state representative write-in candidate must receive at least 150 votes as well as receive the most votes for that party and office.

Successful write-in candidates are required to sign a written acceptance of the nomination and file a receipt from the State Ethics Commission showing they have submitted a Statement of Financial Interest with that agency.

The deadline to file the necessary paperwork with the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Elections Division is **5 p.m. on Thursday, September 3, 2026.**

Known Write-In Candidates

The Elections Division has been notified of the following write-in candidates:

- Anne Manning Martin (Republican) – Lieutenant Governor
- Anne Brensley (Republican) – Secretary of State
- Donnell Wright (Democratic) – Representative in General Court, 11th Hampden Representative District

Though we have not been officially notified, the Elections Division is also aware that the following candidates may be running write-in campaigns:

- Mary Dormer (Republican) – Councillor, 1st District

- William Falcetano (Republican) – Councillor, 5th District
- Fraylin Angelina (Republican) – Senator in General Court, 1st Essex District
- Jesse Michael Barnaby (Republican) – Senator in General Court, Hampden, Hampshire & Worcester District
- Medley Long, III (Republican) – Representative in General Court, 6th Essex District
- Chris Shepley (Republican) – Representative in General Court, 18th Essex Representative District
- Ken Willette (Republican) – Representative in General Court, 4th Essex Representative District

The above names are not necessarily inclusive. Some candidates may notify you directly.

The names of any known write-ins should be pre-printed on the precinct tally sheets to make it easier for poll workers

Reporting State Primary Election Results

Completing Election Night Tallies & Certification

As mentioned previously, **all** State Primary ballots must be counted and securely sealed on the night of the election. Tally sheets containing all votes, including write-in votes and votes on hand-counted ballots, must be completed for each precinct on Election Night.

Election officials cannot discontinue the count and resume at a later time. Election Night is not over until all ballots have been tabulated, sealed, and secured.

The only ballots that may be counted after the day of the State Primary are provisional ballots. Local election officials have 3 days to resolve any provisional ballots for the State Primary and add the votes from eligible provisional ballots to the final tally.

Announcing Unofficial Results

After precinct tallies have been returned to the local election office, the local election official may compile citywide or townwide totals. This is not required, but may be helpful for those seeking unofficial results.

Unofficial results should always **include a disclaimer** that explains the results are unofficial, and what they do and do not include.

If publishing precinct-level vote totals or reporting them to a media outlet, such as the Associated Press, you should report a **combined total for each precinct**, to avoid any confusion about which votes have been counted. Combined precinct totals should include:

- In-person Election Day votes from the polling place; and

- Any ballots counted for that precinct at a central tabulation facility; and
- Any ballots advance deposited for that precinct; and
- Any ballots counted in the local election office for that precinct.

You should only report partial unofficial results for a precinct if waiting to include late-arriving mail-in ballots would unnecessarily delay announcing other results. To avoid delays, every effort should be made to send late-arriving ballots to polling places throughout the day.

Sample Disclaimers

Below is a list of sample disclaimers that you may wish to use when announcing unofficial results.

For results taken from tapes, and not from tally sheets:

These unofficial election results include only the ballots that have been counted by an electronic tabulator. They do not include any hand-counted ballots, provisional ballots, or write-in votes for specific individuals. These results are unofficial and subject to change. Official results are expected to be available no later than [estimated time of certification].

For results that include hand-counts, but not UOCAVA ballots:

These unofficial election results do not include provisional ballots, ballots from overseas and military voters, or write-in votes for specific individuals. These results are unofficial and subject to change. Official results are expected to be available no later than [estimated time of certification].

For partial results that exclude some late-arriving ballots:

These unofficial election results do not include all results for this precinct. Approximately [number of late-arriving ballots] mail-in ballots that were returned to drop boxes before the close of polls have not yet been counted. These ballots must first be verified and checked against polling place voter lists, to ensure that no voter casts more than one ballot. Updated results are expected to be available later tonight at [expected time of completion].

Certifying Results

The deadline to complete certification of results for the September 1, 2026 State Primaries is **Saturday, September 5, 2026**. 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

- **Note:** 2 separate Returns of Votes will need to be signed and mailed – one for each party.