



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Elections Division

Election Advisory #26-04

Election Observers

August 20, 2026

The purpose of this Advisory is to provide local election officials with information about activities that may take place in and around voting locations, including polling places and early voting sites.

This Advisory will include information on what observers in voting locations and tabulation facilities may and may not do while observing.

What is an Observer?

Any person is permitted to observe elections in Massachusetts. Observers must be accommodated at:

- Polling places, beginning 30 minutes before the opening of polls until tallying is complete and all voting materials are sealed
- Early voting sites, during voting hours
- Advance processing locations, during posted advance removal and advance depositing hours
- Central tabulation facilities, beginning at the start of central tabulation until materials are sealed and returned to the election office

An observer is any person who wishes to watch the voting process. The term “observer” may refer to:

- A campaign worker
- A member of the press
- An “election protection” or “election integrity” volunteer
- A “federal monitor” sent by the Department of Justice
- Any other member of the public interested in watching the process

All of these observers are afforded the same rights and have the same level of access. Prohibited activities by any of these observers must be handled by the Warden and the police officer, and reported to the local election official.

If necessary, issues with observers should be escalated to the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Elections Division immediately.

Stationing Observers

Observers must be provided with space to watch the process. The amount of space provided will largely depend on the size of the room. If space is limited, observers must be accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis, with those who contacted the local election official ahead of time given preference.

It is recommended that the polling place have a marked "observers' area" to avoid any confusion about where observers may stand. Most observers prefer to be located within feet of the check-in table, in order to hear the names and addresses of the voters checking in.

Not all observers may wish to be near the check-in table. For instance, members of the press may prefer to observe from other vantage points, particularly if they are taking photographs or video of the polling place.

Seats need not be provided for observers, but doing so may be helpful, if space allows for chairs. It is not recommended that tables be provided, as they could cause voters to mistake observers for election officials.

The space for observers must be outside the guardrail encircling the check-in table, voting booths, check-out table (if any), and ballot box.

- If the polling place does not have a physical guardrail, marking the guardrail on the floor with tape is strongly recommended!

Permitted Activities

Observers inside a voting location or tabulation facility have the right to:

- Watch the voting or counting process from outside the voting area
- Use electronics silently
- Mark their own voting lists to track those who have voted or which ballots have been counted
- Stand close enough to the check-in table to hear names and addresses
- Challenge a voter's ballot for legal cause

- Take photos of the room or activities
- Take silent video of the location and voting process
- Request the count on the ballot box at reasonable intervals
- Speak to the Warden if any issues arise

State law and regulations require voters to say their name and address aloud when checking in, and for the inspector at the check-in table to repeat it back to them loudly enough for any observers to hear.

Remind poll workers to speak loudly and clearly, and always repeat the voter's name and address before marking the list. Doing so will help limit complaints from observers.

Prohibited Activities

Observers are present to observe – not to interact or interfere.

If the Warden or local election official determines that an observer is interfering with voting, obstructing a voter, illegally challenging ballots, or being disruptive, the Warden may order that the observer be removed.

Observers shall not:

- Speak to any voters inside the voting location
- Communicate with voters in writing, through signage or other means
- Address questions or concerns to anyone except the Warden or local election official
- Wear or display anything intended to aid or defeat a candidate or question on the ballot
- Speak on the phone inside the voting location
- Record audio within the polling place
- Challenge ballots with intent to intimidate or determine for whom someone is voting
- Carry a firearm, unless actively on duty as a law enforcement officer
- Use electronics that are not silenced
- Use public power sources in the polling location for charging devices

A police officer or constable must be stationed at every polling place on Election Day to assist election officials in enforcing the election laws. Observers found to be violating the law may be subject to criminal or civil penalties.

Police officers are not required to be present during early voting or at tabulation facilities, but they are strongly recommended.

Issues or Concerns

If issues with observers arise during voting or tabulation of ballots, contact the Elections Division immediately at 617-727-2828.