

Don't just stand there...



*Drawing by
Ruth Meyers Laider*

A Candidate's Guide to Running for Office in 2026

William Francis Galvin

Secretary of the Commonwealth

Elections Division

One Ashburton Place, Room 1705

Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Telephone: (617) 727-2828

Toll-free: 1-800-462-VOTE (in Mass. only)

E-mail: elections@sec.state.ma.us

www.VoteInMA.com

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INTRODUCTION

This guide contains general information regarding the process for running for office in state primaries and elections in Massachusetts. This information is not intended as legal advice. Please note that deadlines and qualifications contained herein are subject to change by law or court order.

OFFICES ON THE BALLOT

Federal Offices

- United States Senator
- United States Representative

Statewide Offices

- Governor
- Lieutenant Governor
- Attorney General
- Secretary of State
- Treasurer and Receiver General
- Auditor

District Offices

- Governor's Councillor
- State Senator
- State Representative
- District Attorney

County Offices

- Register of Probate
- County Commissioner
- County Treasurer

Vacancies

- Sheriff (Franklin County)

2026 STATE ELECTION DATES

The **State Primaries** will be held on **Tuesday, September 1, 2026**.

The **State Election** will be held on **Tuesday, November 3, 2026**.

DEFINITIONS

Certificate of Voter Registration - A certificate issued by the local election office of a non-party candidate's city or town, which certifies that the candidate is a registered voter at their current address, and that they have not been a member of a political party throughout the ninety days prior to the filing deadline with the Elections Division.

Congress - A term used to describe the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, collectively. Sometimes used to refer specifically to the House of Representatives.

County Office - A public office elected by the registered voters in one of the fourteen counties in Massachusetts. County offices include sheriff, clerk of courts and county commissioners.

District Office - A public office elected by the registered voters in a particular district of the state. District offices include Governor's Councillor, State Senator, State Representative, District Attorney, and Register of Deeds.

Enrollment Certificate - A certificate issued by the local election office of a party candidate's city or town, which certifies that the candidate is a registered voter at their current address, and that they meet the party enrollment requirements for the office.

Ethics Receipt - A receipt given to a candidate by the State Ethics Commission upon submission of the candidate's Statement of Financial Interest.

Federal Office - A public office elected by the registered voters of a state or district to represent the voters in the United States government. Federal offices include Electors of President and Vice President, Senator in Congress, and Representative in Congress.

General Court - The official name of the Massachusetts state legislature. Members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives are referred to as Representatives in General Court, while members of the Massachusetts Senate are Senators in General Court.

Local Election Officials - The Board of Registrars or Board of Election Commissioners in each city or town. In most towns, the office of the local election official is the town clerk's office.

Nomination Paper - An official petition used to gather the signatures of registered voters to qualify a candidate for ballot placement.

Non-Party Candidate - A candidate for public office who is not enrolled in any recognized political party in Massachusetts and who files nomination papers to appear directly on the November general election ballot. Includes candidates who are unenrolled – commonly referred to as “independent” – and those registered with a political designation or “minor party.”

Party Candidate - A candidate for public office who is enrolled in a recognized political party in Massachusetts. There are currently two recognized political parties in Massachusetts: Democratic and Republican.

Political Designation - Sometimes referred to as a “minor party,” political designations do not hold primaries. The phrase “political designation” may also refer to the designation of no more than three words which a non-party candidate may choose to have appear next to their name on the ballot.

State Election - A general election, in which registered voters choose people to fill public offices and vote on ballot questions, where applicable.

State Primary - An election in which registered voters nominate party candidates. The names of the winners of the party primaries are placed upon the November state election ballot.

Statement of Public Office - A statement that may appear on state primary ballots beside a candidate’s name, which lists public offices that the candidate holds or has held, but may be no longer than eight words.

Statewide Office - A public office filled by a vote of the registered voters of the entire Commonwealth. Statewide offices include Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Treasurer, and Auditor.

Unenrolled - A registered voter who is not enrolled in any political party or political designation. Such voters are commonly referred to as "Independents."

Written Acceptance - The signature of the candidate or an attorney authorized in writing by the candidate, which signifies the candidate's acceptance of the nomination.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED...

Before filing paperwork to run for office, it is important to learn about the legal requirements.

This section will provide basic information about the process of qualifying for the ballot. It also includes information on party enrollment, residency, and minimum signature requirements, as well as other information you need to know before you get started.

For each office, state law has assigned a minimum number of certified signatures required for ballot access and set specific deadlines for submission and filing of nomination papers. As a candidate, you are responsible for complying with all state laws relative to ballot access.

Forms & Fees

In Massachusetts, you can qualify for the ballot by collecting signatures from voters on nomination papers. Nomination papers for the 2026 State Primary and State Election are prepared by the Elections Division and will be available no later than February 10, 2026.

There are **no filing fees** to qualify for the ballot in Massachusetts.

GETTING ON THE BALLOT

Candidates gain access to the November 3, 2026 general election ballot in one of the following two ways:

- If you are registered in a political party (Democratic or Republican), you must be nominated at the state primary; or
- If you are not enrolled in a party, you submit nomination papers to have your name printed directly on the general election ballot.

A party candidate must win the nomination at the state primary to appear on the state election ballot. A non-party candidate runs in the state election only.

Party Restrictions

Candidates must fulfill specific enrollment requirements when running for office.

If you are running in a primary, you must be an enrolled member of the party whose nomination you seek and cannot have been enrolled in any other party during specified time periods.

Similarly, if you are running as a non-party candidate, you cannot have been enrolled in a party during specific timeframes.

- If you are a candidate for federal office (U.S. Senate or U.S. House) you must commit to running as either a party or a non-party candidate by **March 3, 2026**. You also cannot have switched from one party to another since **June 2, 2025**.
- If you are a candidate for a statewide, district, or county office, you must commit to running as either a party or a non-party candidate by **February 24, 2026**. You also cannot have switched from one party to another since **May 26, 2025**.

If you are already enrolled in a party, you cannot have your name printed on the ballot for a different party's primary.

➤ **Warning:** You must maintain continuous enrollment in your chosen party affiliation for 90 days leading up to the filing deadline. If you change your party affiliation after the deadline, you'll be disqualified from the ballot.

If you are a party candidate, you also cannot run for more than one office at a time. State law prohibits candidates from appearing on the same primary ballot more than once.

Age, Residency & Other Requirements

To have your name printed on the state ballot, you need to be a registered voter of Massachusetts. This means you must be at least 18 years old and a resident of Massachusetts by the filing deadline.

Some offices have additional eligibility requirements to hold the office:

- **US Senator** – You must be at least 30 years old.
- **US Representative** – You must be at least 25 years old.
- **Governor** – You must have resided in the Commonwealth for 7 years before Election Day.
- **Lieutenant Governor** – You must have resided in the Commonwealth for 7 years before Election Day.
- **Attorney General** – You must have resided in the Commonwealth for 5 years before Election Day and you must be a member of the Massachusetts Bar.
- **Secretary of State** – You must have resided in the Commonwealth for 5 years before Election Day.
- **Treasurer and Receiver General** – You must have resided in the Commonwealth for 5 years before Election Day.
- **Auditor** – You must have resided in the Commonwealth for 5 years before Election Day.

- **State Representative** – You must reside in the district for one year before Election Day.
- **State Senator** – You must reside in the district on Election Day, and must have resided in Massachusetts for five years before Election Day.
- **Governor's Councillor** – You must have resided in Massachusetts for five years before Election Day.
- **District Attorney** – You must be a resident of the district and a member of the Massachusetts Bar.
- **Register of Probate** – No residency requirements.
- **County Commissioner** – If elected, you cannot reside in the same city or town as another county commissioner.
- **County Treasurer** – You must be a resident of the county.
- **Sheriff** – No residency requirements.

Signature Requirements

State law sets the number of signatures required for ballot access, which can vary by office. To qualify to have your name printed on the ballot, you will need to collect the following numbers of certified signatures:

- US Senator – **10,000**
- US Representative – **2,000**
- Governor – **10,000**
- Lieutenant Governor – **10,000**
- Attorney General – **10,000**
- Secretary of State – **5,000**
- Treasurer – **5,000**
- Auditor – **5,000**
- Governor’s Councillor – **1,000**
- State Senator – **300**
- State Representative – **150**
- District Attorney – **1,000**

For the county offices of Register of Probate, County Commissioner, County Treasurer, and Sheriff, the number of signatures varies by county. These offices require the following numbers of signatures:

- Bristol, Essex, Hampden, Middlesex, Norfolk, Plymouth, Suffolk and Worcester Counties – **1,000**
- Barnstable, Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire Counties – **500**
- Dukes and Nantucket Counties – **25**

2026 DATES AND DEADLINES

Candidate deadlines differ by office and party status. Review the dates carefully for the office you are seeking.

Please note that dates contained in this guide may be changed in accordance with laws passed by the General Court after the publication of this calendar. Please contact the Elections Division to inquire of any changes.

District & County Candidates

For candidates running for State Senate, State Representative, Governor's Council, District Attorney, Register of Probate, County Commissioner, County Treasurer, or Sheriff.

Event	Date
Last day for a person running in the state primary to enroll in a party or for a person running only in the state election to unenroll from a party (except newly registered voters).	February 24, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to submit nomination papers to local election officials for certification of signatures.	April 28, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for local election officials to complete certification of signatures.	May 19, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for candidates to apply for review of non-certified signatures.	May 21, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for local election officials to complete review of non-certified signatures.	May 22, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to file nomination papers (including party enrollment or voter registration certificate and Ethics receipt) with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.	May 26, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to file withdrawals of or objections to nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.	May 29, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to fill vacancies caused by withdrawals.	June 3, 2026

Federal & Statewide Party Candidates

For party candidates running for U.S. Senate, U.S. Representative, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer, or Auditor.

Event	Date
Last day for a person running in the state primary to enroll in a party (except newly registered voters).	March 3, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to submit nomination papers to local election officials for certification of signatures.	May 5, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for local election officials to complete certification of signatures.	May 26, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for candidates to apply for review of non-certified signatures.	May 28, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for local election officials to complete review of non-certified signatures.	June 1, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to file nomination papers (including party enrollment certificate, OCPF receipt and Ethics receipt) with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.	June 2, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to file withdrawals of or objections to nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.	June 5, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to fill vacancies caused by withdrawals.	June 10, 2026

Federal & Statewide Non-Party Candidates

For non-party candidates running for U.S. Senate, U.S. Representative, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer, or Auditor.

Event	Date
Last day for a person running only in the state election to unenroll from a party (except newly registered voters).	March 3, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to submit nomination papers to local election officials for certification of signatures.	July 28, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for local election officials to complete certification of signatures.	August 18, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for candidates to apply for review of non-certified signatures.	August 20, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour for local election officials to complete review of non-certified signatures.	August 24, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to file nomination papers (including voter registration certificate, OCPF Receipt, and Ethics receipt) with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.	August 25, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to file withdrawals of or objections to nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.	August 28, 2026
5:00 p.m., last day and hour to fill vacancies caused by withdrawals.	September 2, 2026

NOMINATION PAPERS

All candidates seeking to have their name printed on either the state primary ballot or state election ballot must file nomination papers.

Nomination papers for party candidates are white in color, while nomination papers for non-party candidates are yellow or beige. Candidates should ensure that they have chosen the correct nomination papers before gathering signatures.

Availability

Nomination papers are available from the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth in the Boston, Fall River, and Springfield offices, and may be picked up or requested by telephone or in writing.

Nomination papers may also be available in certain city or town halls throughout the Commonwealth. Contact the Elections Division for a full list of locations where nomination papers are available.

Boston — Elections Division
One Ashburton Place, Room 1705, Boston, MA 02108
617-727-2828 or 1-800-462-VOTE (8683)
elections@sec.state.ma.us
Hours: Mon – Fri, 8:45 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Springfield — Secretary of the Commonwealth – Western Office
436 Dwight Street, Room 102, Springfield, MA 01103
Hours: Mon – Fri, 8:45 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Fall River — Secretary of the Commonwealth – Southeastern Office
218 South Main Street, Suite 206, Fall River, MA 02721
Hours: Mon – Fri, 8:45 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

If you are unable to pick up your papers in person, we can mail nomination papers to you. Contact the Elections Division to arrange for mail delivery – **papers cannot be provided electronically.**

COMPLETING NOMINATION PAPERS

Before gathering signatures on a nomination paper, you must add your own information to the space at the top that is shaded in gray. You can type or hand-write these entries, but they should be consistent on all papers.

If you are a non-party statewide candidate using beige slate papers, make sure all candidates' information is completed.

- Do NOT gather any signatures without this section completed!

Signatures on papers missing any of the required information cannot be counted.

Reduce the risk of disqualified signatures by completing every field on your nomination papers. Use the instructions below to help.

- *Note: This guidance is based on state law and legal precedent. Any nomination paper considered acceptable for filing can still be challenged before the State Ballot Law Commission.*

Party or Political Designation

If you are running as a party candidate in the state primary, using white nomination papers, you must insert your political party here. The only recognized political parties in Massachusetts are Democratic and Republican.

If you are running as a non-party candidate in the state election, using yellow or beige nomination papers, you can choose up to three words to express your political designation. You can use the word "Independent," but you cannot use the names of either of the official political parties. If you leave this box blank, you will be designated as "Unenrolled" on the ballot. Papers submitted with different political designations will be counted as separate filings.

Name

Insert your name here. You can use a common or known nickname, but your name will appear on the ballot as you are registered to vote.

Check your voter registration with your local election official before completing the nomination papers.

Residence

Insert your full residential address here. You must include your street number, street name, and some identifiable reference to your city/ town.

A neighborhood name or zip code is considered an identifiable reference to the city or town.

- Example: "1 Main Street, Boston," "1 Main Street, Brighton," or "1 Main Street, 02135."

Office

Insert the office for which you are running here. We accept commonly recognized names for offices, such as "US Representative," "State Representative," "State Senator," or "Governor's Councillor." Offices will appear on the ballot as:

- Senator in Congress
- Representative in Congress
- Governor
- Lieutenant Governor
- Attorney General
- Secretary of State
- Treasurer
- Auditor
- Representative in General Court
- Senator in General Court
- Councillor
- District Attorney
- Register of Probate
- County Commissioner
- County Treasurer
- Sheriff

On beige non-party statewide slate papers, the offices are pre-printed in the gray areas.

District

Insert the name of the district in which you are running. Confirm the district before completing your papers, to ensure you gather valid voter signatures.

On beige non-party statewide slate papers, no district is required.

CIRCULATING NOMINATION PAPERS

Organizing Your Papers

If your district includes more than one city or town, you must keep separate sheets for voters from different communities.

You can use the box at the bottom of each nomination paper sheet to add the name of the city or town in which you are collecting signatures. This is not required for submission, but it can help keep your papers organized.

Gathering Signatures

Who Can Sign?

You can only gather signatures from registered voters in the district in which you are running. You do not, however, need to gather signatures from every city and town in your district, or from a certain number of communities in your district.

If you are running as a party candidate, you can gather signatures from voters who are members in the same party or who are not enrolled in any party. You cannot gather signatures from members of a different party.

- Example: If you run as a Republican, you can gather signatures from other Republicans, or from unenrolled (or “Independent”) voters.
Signatures of registered Democrats will not be certified.

If you are running as a non-party candidate, you can gather signatures from any registered voter in your district.

Voters can sign papers for as many candidates as they wish. The same voter may sign your papers and your opponent’s papers and be certified for both.

How to Sign?

Voters should sign their name as they are registered and must include the address at which they are registered to vote. Voters must sign their own name. No person may sign for another unless they are unable to sign because of a physical disability, in which case they can authorize another individual to sign

for them in the voter's presence.

Local election officials will certify a voter's signature, as long as:

- The signature is legible
- The name is signed "substantially as registered"
- The address matches the voter's registration
- The voter hasn't already signed your papers

"Substantially as registered" means that the election official can reasonably determine that the name is that of a voter registered at the address provided. Common or known nicknames are allowed, as are printed signatures.

Local election officials will not be able to certify voter signatures if they cannot read them, or if they determine that they are not signed "substantially as registered." They will note any denial reason on the nomination paper. This includes if the voter writes a different street address than where they are registered or if they omit the street address.

SUBMITTING NOMINATION PAPERS

You must submit signatures to the local election offices where the signers are registered to vote. Local election officials can only certify the names of their own voters, so submit your papers to the correct offices.

- Example: For a district that includes parts of Springfield and Agawam, submit Springfield voter signatures to the Springfield Election Commission, and Agawam voter signatures to the Agawam Town Clerk.

Each local election office will issue a receipt for your nomination papers, noting the number of sheets filed. The local election official will mark any blank spaces on the papers in red at the time of submission.

You must submit your nomination papers to city and town election offices by the applicable deadlines. Any person can submit your nomination papers to the local election office.

You can also mail your papers to the appropriate office, but the papers must physically arrive at the election office by the deadline. Postmark dates are not enough to qualify for certification if the papers arrive late.

RETRIEVING NOMINATION PAPERS

After local election officials finish certifying your nomination papers, it is your responsibility to retrieve them. Anyone can collect nomination papers with proper identification, including:

- The original receipt issued during submission
- A letter on campaign letterhead authorizing the person to collect the papers
- Telephone authorization by the candidate

Local election officials can also return the papers to you if they personally recognize you as the candidate (or as the person who submitted the papers).

Before leaving the local election office, check each page for certification by at least three registrars. Registrar signatures (or stamped signatures) should appear in the certification box on the back of each page.

➤ **Reminder:** If you are picking up nomination papers from your own local election office, look for an enrollment certificate or voter registration certificate on at least one sheet. This certificate is located underneath the gray box on your papers.

Review of Uncertified Signatures

If you do not have enough certified signatures, or if you have less than 10% more than the total number you need, you can ask clerks to review specific, uncertified signatures. Check your papers before you leave the local election office! Signatures cannot be reviewed if the papers have left the office.

To request a review, list the uncertified signatures that you want reviewed by page and number. Registrars will check the signatures for any clerical errors, make any corrections, and return the papers to you.

FILING NOMINATION PAPERS

After you have retrieved your papers from the local election officials, you must file them with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. When you file, our staff will:

- Check that all candidate information is completed in the gray areas of each nomination paper
- Confirm that each sheet is signed or stamped by at least three registrars
- Count the number of signatures certified by election officials
- Gather contact information about the filer and the campaign
- Issue a receipt indicating ballot status, and any remaining paperwork needed to complete your filing

A complete filing includes:

- The number of certified **signatures** required for your office
- An **Enrollment Certificate/Voter Registration Certificate**
- Your **Written Acceptance** of the nomination
- An **Ethics Receipt** from the State Ethics Commission
- For statewide candidates, an **OCPF Receipt**

Candidates for US Senate and US Representative do NOT need to file an Ethics Receipt or an OCPF Receipt.

Our staff will indicate if you are missing anything from your filing on your receipt.

- **File early!** You do not need to file all of your signatures or paperwork at once. You can file any number of signatures, as soon as you have certified papers. Filing early allows time to gather additional signatures, if needed.

The **Enrollment Certificate**, or in the case of a non-party candidate, the **Voter Registration Certificate**, is included on your nomination papers. You only need to provide one certificate.

Your **Written Acceptance** is also included on your nomination papers, below the gray box containing the candidate information. Sign your name in this space on at least one nomination paper.

Include the **Ethics Receipt** that you received from the State Ethics Commission with your papers. The receipt confirms that you filed a Statement of Financial Interests (SFI) with the Ethics Commission.

- Most candidates file the SFI online and receive an electronic receipt to print and file with our office. Visit www.mass.gov/ethics to access the Ethics Commission's online filing system. Contact the Ethics Commission at 617-371-9500 with any questions.

If you are running for a **statewide office**, you must file a statement with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance regarding campaign spending limits. OCPF will issue an **OCPF Receipt**, which must be filed with the Elections Division.

Statement of Public Office

If you are a party candidate, you may include a statement of public office on the state primary ballot. This statement appears below your name.

Your statement of public office can be up to eight words, and may list:

- Any public office you currently hold
- Any public office you previously held (preceded by the word "former")
- The word "Veteran"
- The words "Candidate for Re-nomination" (if you are an elected incumbent in the district)

A public office may be an appointed or elected position, but a holder of a public office must have some degree of discretion or authority of government. Public offices are typically created by statute, charter, or executive order.

A position is not a public office if it's:

- Merely clerical in nature
- Merely advisory in nature
- A political party office (such as state, ward, or town committee member)

Statements of public office are optional, and are only included on the primary ballot. You may be asked to provide documentation about the position, such as the legislation that creates it and what the duties are.

On the state election ballot, if you are an elected incumbent, you'll appear as a "Candidate for Re-election."

OBJECTIONS

Anyone can view your filing once it is complete. Any registered voter in your district can file an objection before the State Ballot Law Commission. Challenges can be made to your nomination papers or to other requirements for office.

If a challenger files an objection against you, you will be notified and likely summoned to a hearing before the State Ballot Law Commission. If you have any proceedings before the State Ballot Law Commission, it is strongly recommended that you retain legal counsel familiar with Massachusetts election law.

ORGANIZING A CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

Before raising or spending money on your campaign, you need to organize a Campaign Committee.

If you are running as a candidate for district or county office, contact the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) about setting up a campaign committee. OCPF is an independent agency that administers state campaign finance laws.

Office of Campaign and Political Finance

One Ashburton Place, Room 411

Boston, MA 02108

617-979-8300 or 1-800-462-OCPF (6273)

ocpf@mass.gov

www.ocpf.us

If you are running as a candidate for federal office, contact the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The FEC is the federal agency that administers federal campaign finance laws.

Federal Election Commission

1050 First Street, NE

Washington, D.C. 20463

1-800-424-9530

info@fec.gov

www.fec.gov

William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth
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