



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Memo

To: Political Parties, Candidates, Public Observers

From: Miguel J. Nuñez, Executive Director

Date: 10/16/2024

Re: Guidance Regarding Poll Checkers, Runners, & Watchers, and Observers

Background:

The Board of Elections voted unanimously on October 15, 2024, to issue the following guidance regarding the presence of poll Checkers, Runners Watchers, and Observers pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws **§ 17-19-22, 17-15-22** and Board Regulation **410-RICR-20-00-12**.

This memo was compiled partially based on a Fact Sheet compiled by the Board of Canvassers Working Group issued on September 25, 2024.

Official Recognition:

- Poll Checkers and poll Watchers are only officially recognized if they bear proper credentials from the proper ward or town committee party chairperson.
- A letter from the proper ward or town committee party chairperson may qualify as accepted credential.
- Without these credentials, individuals have no legal standing to act as poll Checkers or poll Watchers.

Poll Checkers:

- Poll Checkers shall be allowed to sit for the purpose of keeping track of those who are voting. These may be changed during the day.
- A representative, known as a Runner, of each of the parties shall be allowed to come to the table at frequent intervals for the purpose of taking whatever list or memoranda the Checkers may wish to give the runner.

Poll Watchers:

- The proper ward or town committee party chairperson is allowed to appoint one poll Watcher per polling location.
- Poll Watchers and are the only designees who have the right to challenge the identity of a voter, other than Election Officials.

Observers:

- The public may be present in the polling place to observe the conduct of an election. Only voters and election officials are allowed in the Railed or Enclosed Voting Area. No person(s) may willfully hinder the orderly conduct of an election.

Voter Challenges:

- Challenges made by poll Watchers must be based on "good cause" and will be evaluated by the polling place Moderator/Warden.
- If the challenge is accepted by the Moderator/Warden, the voter will be required to cast a provisional ballot.
- The Moderator/Warden is responsible for notifying the local Board of Canvassers whenever a challenge is made.
- Poll Watchers may not make frivolous challenges. Frivolous challenges may lead to poll Watchers being removed from the polling place and credentials being voided. The poll Watcher is not permitted to disrupt the voting process.

Procedures and Collaboration:

- A table and chairs must be provided outside the enclosed space by the city/town for the party representatives known as Checkers and Watchers. In the absence of party representatives, the public may use the table and chairs.

- Local Boards of Canvassers should inform all board members, staff, local party chairs and police departments of the rules and guidelines concerning poll Checkers, Runners, Observers and Watchers to ensure proper understanding and coordination.

Important Notes:

- Only poll Watchers (with credentials) can challenge the identity of a voter.
- All challenges must be reviewed and determined by the Moderator/Warden.
- Clear communication between Boards of Canvassers, election staff, and local law enforcement is essential for smooth polling operations.

This memo summarizes the official procedures and guidelines for poll Checkers, poll Watchers, poll Runners poll Observers as determined by the Rhode Island Board of Elections. For further information, contact the Board of Elections at 401-222-2345 or boe.elections@elections.ri.gov.



**RULES AND REGULATIONS
FOR POLLING PLACE CONDUCT**

Promulgated by order of
The Rhode Island State Board of Elections
Richard R. DuBois, Chair

RECEIVED



SEP 01 2016

RI SECRETARY OF STATE
ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS

**RULES & REGULATIONS FOR POLLING PLACE CONDUCT ADOPTED
BY THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

The Rhode Island Board of Elections hereby adopts rules and regulations relating to polling place conduct pursuant to and in accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-15-26, 17-19-21, 17-19-21.1, 17-19-22, 17-19-23, 17-19-24, 17-19-27, 17-19-49, 17-23-15 and 17-23-17.

Said rules and regulations are adopted pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act (R.I. G.L. § 42-35 et seq.) and are available for public inspection at the offices of the Rhode Island Board of Elections, 50 Branch Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island.

Section 1. Purpose

This rule is adopted by the Board of Elections to ensure the orderly conduct of elections, and enforce the provisions of Rhode Island General Laws §§ 17-11-15, 17-15-26, 17-19-21, 17-19-21.1, 17-19-22, 17-19-23, 17-19-24, 17-19-27, 17-19-49, 17-23-15 and 17-23-17.

Section 2. Definitions

Act of Voting shall include the period of time in which a voter has entered a polling place for the sole purpose of casting a ballot. The Act of Voting begins when the voter enters a Polling Place and begins approach to the supervisor's table. It concludes when the voter has inserted the ballot into the optical scan reader and exits the Polling Place.

Bake Sales shall refer to the sale of food items such as cookies, cakes and non-alcoholic beverages for raising funds in support of non-profit and charitable organizations.

Checkers shall mean representatives of each recognized political party bearing credentials signed by the proper ward or town committee chairperson who maintains a record of who has voted at the Polling Place.

Election Official shall include the Board of Elections and its designees, the Local Canvassing Authority and its designees, including but not limited to, Moderator/Wardens, Clerks and Supervisors. No person shall be appointed or serve as an Election Official who has been convicted, found guilty, pleaded guilty or *nolo contendere*, or placed on a deferred or suspended sentence, or on probation, for any crime which involves moral turpitude or which constitutes a violation of any of the election or caucus laws of this or any other state. No candidate for any office to be filled at any election shall be appointed as an Election Official. Every Election Official shall make an affidavit before some member of the proper board of canvassers attesting that he or she is eligible to serve as an Election Official, consistent with the requirements of state law.

Party Representative shall mean any credentialed party checker, runner or watcher as designated under R.I.G.L. 17-19-22.

Political Literature shall include any paper, circular or other document designed or tending to aid, injure or defeat any candidate for public office or any political party or any question submitted to the voters. Documents that constitute political literature include any flyer, campaign button, or any

item of clothing that contains any electioneering communication, including words or images, or election symbol attributed to a campaign that promotes the election or defeat of any candidate or ballot question that appears on the ballot.

Polling Place Observer shall mean any person observing the election at a Polling Place on behalf of a party or candidate.

Polling Place means the room or area in a building which contains voting booths and where voting is conducted at any primary or election for the election of any candidate, write-in candidate, party or ballot question.

Railed or Enclosed Voting Area shall mean the enclosed area within the polling place where ballots are cast. The railed or enclosed area shall be delineated by tables or other means having one entrance and one exit in the area within which ballots are cast.

Runners shall mean those representatives of any recognized party who shall retrieve whatever list or memoranda the Checkers have prepared and shall be allowed to come to the table for the Checkers at frequent intervals.

Supervisors shall be assigned by the Warden/Moderator in bipartisan pairs at the Polling Place and shall be in charge of the voting list and shall announce the voter's name and certify his or her identity before permitting the person to enter the Railed or Enclosed Voting Area. The Warden/Moderator may also assign additional duties to the Supervisors such as the oversight of and assistance to voters while they are in and about the voting booths.

Wardens or Moderators shall have general supervisory powers at each Polling Place and shall be responsible for supervising the overall orderly and efficient conduct at the Polling Place and shall ensure compliance with the elections laws and regulations governing polling place conduct, including the casting of ballots.

Watcher shall mean a representative of each recognized political party bearing credentials signed by the proper ward or term committee chairperson. A Watcher shall be allowed outside the enclosed voting area to observe the voting and to assist the Checkers.

Section 3. Open Elections

The public may be present in the polling place to observe the conduct of an election. Only voters and election officials are allowed in the Railed or Enclosed Voting Area. No person(s) may willfully hinder the orderly conduct of an election.

Section 4. Table and Chairs Provided for Party Representatives

A table and chairs must be provided outside the enclosed space by the city/town for the party representatives known as Checkers and Watchers. In the absence of party representatives, the public may use the table and chairs.

Section 5. Polling Place Conduct

A. Political Literature and Influence

1. Outside the Polling Place

No person – other than a person in the act of voting – shall be allowed to display or distribute any poster, paper, circular, campaign or political party button, badge or other document or item designed or tending to aid, injure, or defeat any candidate for public office or any political party on any question submitted to the voters within fifty (50) feet of the entrance or entrances to the Polling Place.

No person shall conduct any form of poll or survey of voter opinion or voter conduct within a Polling Place or within fifty (50) feet from the entrance or entrances to any Polling Place.

2. Inside the Polling Place

No person – other than a voter in the act of voting – may display or wear any campaign or political party button, badge or other document or item designed or tending to aid, injure or defeat any candidate for public office or any political party or any question submitted to the voters within the Polling Place. Any voter displaying or wearing any political literature who has completed the voting process must immediately exit the polling location without unreasonable delay. No activity that is intended to interfere with a person's right to vote, shall be permitted within a Polling Place.

B. Electronic Recording Devices in the Polling Place

Electronic recording of the election process is allowed inside the polling place as long as it is done outside of the Railed or Enclosed Voting Area. Electronic recording devices may not hinder the election process or compromise a voter's right to cast a secret ballot. The electronic recording of specific votes(s) cast by another person is prohibited.

C. Talking on Cellular Telephones and other Communications Devices.

Only election officials conducting official election business are allowed to verbally communicate on a cell phone or other communication device within the Polling Place. All other communications being made to persons outside the Polling Place must be done nonverbally to ensure the orderly conduct of the Election.

D. Challenges

Only the Watchers and Election Officials are allowed to challenge the right to vote of any person offering himself or herself as a voter. All challenges must be made for good cause. Whenever the identity of any person offering to vote is challenged at the Polling Place, that person shall only be permitted to vote using a provisional ballot as defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-19-24.1.

E. Bake Sales

Bake sales may be held in a building designated as a Polling Place and that is under the supervision of the Warden/Moderator, during any primary or election for the election of any candidate, write-in candidate, party or ballot question. Bake sales shall not be allowed within the Railed Enclosed Voting Area or in any part of the building that the Warden/Moderator reasonably believes will cause a disruption or interference in the orderly administration of the voting process. Such activity will only be permitted within the area expressly designated by the Warden/Moderator for such activity. Sponsors of proposed bake sales must first seek and obtain permission to hold the bake sale event from the appropriate local board of canvassers. All requests for bake sales must be submitted in writing to the local board of canvassers no later than seven (7) days prior to the date for the primary or election. Bake sales shall be permitted as long as such conduct does not interfere with the orderly conduct of the election, as determined by the Warden/Moderator.

Section 6. Procedures for Maintaining Order at the Polling Place

A Warden/Moderator may cause to be removed or arrested any person or official who commits a violation of the election law in their presence or disturbs the conduct of the voting, including any conduct that is designed to discourage a person from exercising his/her right to vote; provided, that they shall not cause any removal or arrest without the approval of the election inspector, unless the clerk agrees with the Warden/Moderator that the person or official should be arrested or removed (R.I.G.L. 17-19-23(9)). Either the Warden/Moderator or the Clerk may in their discretion issue a warning to a person(s) whose acts are disturbing the conduct of the voting.

If a person believes that an Election Official is violating state election laws he/she may contact their Local Canvassing Authority or the State Board of Elections to file a complaint.

Section 7. Implementation

The Board of Elections may promulgate procedures and forms necessary to implement the within rules and regulations required under the Rhode Island General Laws.

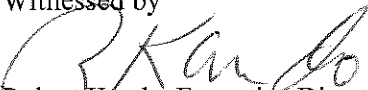
These rules and regulations were adopted at a meeting of the State Board of Elections held on the Twenty-fourth day of August, 2016 pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act (R.I.G.L. 42-35-1, *et seq.*).

By Order of the Rhode Island Board of Elections


Richard R. DuBois, Chair Date


8-31-16

Witnessed by


Robert Kando, Executive Director

Date

8/31/16

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Title 17

Elections

Chapter 19

Conduct of Election and Voting Equipment, and Supplies

R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-19-22

§ 17-19-22. Party checkers, runners, and watchers.

The officers required to furnish and equip any voting place shall also provide a table in the room where the voting is conducted, outside the enclosed space near the first bipartisan pair of supervisors, at which a representative of each recognized political party bearing credentials signed by the proper ward or town committee chairperson, shall be allowed to sit for the purpose of keeping track of those who are voting, and these representatives, who shall be known as “checkers,” may be changed during the day. A representative, known as a “runner,” of each of the parties shall be allowed to come to the table at frequent intervals for the purpose of taking whatever list or memoranda the checkers may wish to give the runner. A representative of each recognized political party bearing credentials signed by the proper ward or town committee chairperson, shall also be allowed outside the enclosed place to observe the voting and assist the checkers, and these representatives shall be known as “watchers.” The watchers and any election official shall have the right to challenge the right to vote of any person offering himself or herself as a voter.

History of Section.

G.L. 1938, ch. 318, § 12; P.L. 1940, ch. 818, § 1; G.L. 1956, § 17-19-26; G.L. 1956, § 17-19-22; P.L. 1958, ch. 18, § 1; P.L. 2007, ch. 400, § 2.

Title 17

Elections

Chapter 15

Primary Elections

R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-15-22

§ 17-15-22. Party checkers, runners and watchers.

The local board shall, by written rule, provide for the presence of party checkers to be seated outside the rail next to the warden to make a list of those who vote and for the distribution of lists or memoranda to the proper representatives or candidates or groups of candidates. Party checkers, runners and watchers shall be regulated in the same manner as directed in § 17-19-22.

History of Section.

P.L. 1947, ch. 1886, § 23; P.L. 1948, ch. 2100, § 1; G.L. 1956, § 17-15-22; P.L. 1958, ch. 18, § 1; P.L. 2007, ch. 400, § 1.