

# Pollwatcher's Guide

Elections Division  
Office of the Iowa Secretary of State

For more information call  
515-281-0145, voice or 281-5865TDD



Dear Pollwatcher,

The fact you are reading this Pollwatcher's Guide indicates that you are actively involved in the election process. As the State Commissioner of Elections and State Registrar of Voters, I applaud your active participation and encourage you to use the information in this guide to assist you in your role as a pollwatcher in our election process.

This guide published by my office contains information about who can be a pollwatcher and how one can become a pollwatcher. This guide also highlights the parameters of a pollwatcher's role.

I hope you find this guide to be a valuable resource. However, you should always feel free to contact my staff in the Elections Division at 515-281-0145 with any questions you may have. You may also contact my office toll free at 1-888-SOS-VOTE to leave a message.

Thank you again for your active participation in our democracy and its election process.

Sincerely,

Chester J. Culver  
Secretary of State

## What is a pollwatcher?

A person who has official permission to be at the polling place on election day to

- ✓ observe the election process and
- ✓ challenge voters the pollwatcher believes not to be qualified to vote.

Pollwatchers are also called challenging committees or observers. They may represent candidates, political parties and organizations, and groups opposing or supporting approval of questions on the ballot at an election.

**NUMBERS LIMITED.** There is a limit to the number of pollwatchers who can be in a polling place at the same time:

- ✓ 3 from each political party.\*
- ✓ 1 from each nonparty political organization.\*

- ✓ 1 for each nonpartisan candidate.
- ✓ 3 people interested in questions on the ballot. This means a total of three people at a time, not three people for each group and question.

\*If they have candidates on the ballot.

## Who can give official permission to be a pollwatcher?

Pollwatchers for candidates are appointed by:

- ✓ County political party organization
- ✓ Nonparty political organizations.
- ✓ Nonpartisan candidates.

Pollwatchers for questions are approved by

- ✓ The county auditor.

Pollwatchers for questions on the ballot must file a notice with the county auditor before election day. If more than three people have asked to serve as pollwatchers at the same time for questions on the ballot, the auditor will schedule the pollwatchers so that there will never be more than three pollwatchers for public measures at the same time. The auditor must try to have both supporters and opponents represented.

## Who can be a pollwatcher?

Any person with the appropriate credentials who is not prohibited by law from serving as a pollwatcher. They are not required to be residents of the county.

## Who cannot be a pollwatcher?

- ✓ Candidates for offices on the ballot.
- ✓ Elected officials whose offices are being voted on at the election.
- ✓ Precinct officials working at the election.

## How can I become a pollwatcher?

**FOR A CANDIDATE OR PARTY:** Pollwatchers for candidates or political parties or organizations must show written permission to the precinct officials at the polling place on election day. Forms are available from the county auditor and must be signed by a person authorized to designate pollwatchers:

- ✓ *Accreditation Form for Political Parties.* (Form 1-M. This form is optional; political parties may provide other written credentials.)
- ✓ *Letter of Appointment for Nonpartisan and Nonparty Candidates.* (Form 1-O. This form is required.)

**FOR A QUESTION ON THE BALLOT:** Before election day, file a *Declaration of Intent to Serve as an Election Observer* (Form 1-J). Your county auditor has copies of this form. The auditor will notify the precinct officials and the pollwatchers of the schedule for pollwatchers for ballot questions.

**What can pollwatchers do?**

- ✓ Pollwatchers may look at the *Declarations of Eligibility* signed by each voter.
- ✓ Make note of the names of people who have or have not voted and report that information to their organizations.
- ✓ Challenge any person whom the pollwatcher believes is not qualified to vote. A precinct official will announce the name of every voter. A challenge must be made before the person votes.
- ✓ Participate when the precinct officials ask a challenged voter questions to find out whether the person should be permitted to vote without casting a special ballot.
- ✓ Withdraw a challenge if the pollwatcher is satisfied that the person is qualified.

**What can't pollwatchers do?**

- Interfere with the election process.
- ✓ Handle ballots.
- ✓ Use polling place equipment and supplies.
- ✓ Ask people in the polling place to vote for specific candidates or questions on the ballot.
- ✓ Give or display campaign literature or gifts to Voters.
- ✓ Wear political buttons, stickers, jewelry or clothing.

**What if the election officials do something a pollwatcher thinks is wrong?**

The pollwatcher should call the county auditor right away and report the problem.

**County Auditor's office telephone number**



**Who can observe after the polls close?**

After the polls close, the process of counting the ballots is public. Anyone may watch. No one (except election officials) may handle ballots or interfere with the count.

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**CHESTER J. CULVER**  
**SECRETARY OF STATE**

[www.sos.state.ia.us](http://www.sos.state.ia.us)

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