

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE POLL WHEN YOU GO TO CAST YOUR VOTE

You've read the material that we have distributed over the last four months and done research on your own. You've decided that you'll be able to go to your polling place rather than requesting an Absentee Ballot or Mail Ballot. So what should you expect the voting process to be?

When you arrive at your polling place in Centre County Pennsylvania, you'll see signs from the various candidates asking for your vote. You may even encounter people who support a party, or a candidate. Those signs and/or people may not be any closer than 10 feet from the door into the polling place. And any literature that a voter carries into the polling place may not be left inside the polling place. The Judge of Elections and his/her staff for that polling place are responsible to remove any information left accidentally by a voter. Likewise no candidate or supporter may "politic" within a polling place.

The Judge of Elections for each polling place is responsible to hire sufficient staff and arrange the furniture to ensure a smooth flow within the room to accommodate the registered voters for their precinct. The room must be ready BEFORE 7:00 A.M. on Election Day. Informational signs are posted on the walls of the polling place to aid voters.

Registered Voters enter the voting room and begin to progress through the four steps of casting their ballot.

First Step:

As you enter the room set up for the voters to cast their ballot, the first step in the process is referred to as the "Poll Books". Some precincts need only one Poll Book, but other precincts could have two or even three Poll Books. If only one book, it will contain information about every registered voter in that precinct. If there is more than one Poll Book, one book will contain information for registered voters whose first letter in their last name starts with the letter "A" and goes through "L" or "M", and another Poll Book completes the alphabet.

You will be asked for your name and your address. If that information matches the information in the Poll Book, you will be asked to sign the Poll Book at a specific place in the Book. The poll worker will announce your name, which is required by PA Election Code, and may spell it. They are talking to two members of the Election Board staff who will write your name in the TWO Numbered List of Voters Booklets (A.K.A. Number Books). At the end of the day, one of the Number Books goes back to Bellfonte's Election Office and the other copy is securely stored separately.

The two people who enter your name in the Number Books will announce the Ballot number to the people who are responsible for the Poll Book(s). They write the Ballot Number in the Poll Book and enter the Poll Workers initials.

Second Step:

The poll worker responsible for issuing Ballots verifies the Ballot number and hands the designated Ballot to the voter.

Third Step:

The voter then goes to an open booth to read the instructions in the upper left-hand corner of the Ballot, then marks their Ballot so it can be taken to the Ballot machine. Before going to the Ballot machine, the voter is responsible for removing the stub at the bottom of their ballot. This step removes any linkage of the ballot's number from the ballot. Your ballot is now ready to be fed into the Ballot machine.

Fourth Step:

One of the Election Board staff will be assigned to be at the Ballot machine to provide any needed assistance. In Centre County the voter can request a "Security Folder", and one will be provided. With or without a Security Folder, the voter inserts their Ballot face up or down, top or bottom first into the machine. The machine reads the Ballot and if accepted, it lets the voter know the Ballot was counted.

If an error is detected, the machine alerts the voter. An error would be that the voter voted for more candidates for one office than permitted. Most offices on the Ballot anticipate one vote for each office, but some instruct the voter to vote for NO MORE THAN two or more in the case of School Board, Town Council, etc. If a voter votes for more people than programmed, the machine will alert the voter and provide options to complete the vote.

Generally, the two options are: (1) accept the Ballot as marked. If this option is chosen by the voter, the office with too many selections will NOT be counted but the rest of the Ballot choices will be accepted. Or (2) "Spoil" the Ballot and request a new Ballot. The Election Board Staff will "spoil" the erroneous Ballot; issue a new Ballot after they correct the Poll Book and the two Number Books. The voter then marks the new Ballot and takes it to the Ballot machine for processing and acceptance.

As you may have guessed, there are several exceptions.

At some elections, a political party or candidate may request permission for one of their supporters to be in the voting area to watch for any potential violations. That person (called a Poll Watcher), could go to any of the Centre County polling locations, show the Election Judge proper identification, watch the proceedings at that poll for a while, then go to other polling places. But in some cases space may not be available. The Election Judge will make whatever accommodations as possible. But the primary objective is to make the voting process as comfortable as possible for the registered voters.

If you are a new voter at this precinct, you will be required to show some form of identification. So a week or more before Election Day, you might want to check on-line at <https://www.votespa.com/Pages/default.aspx#> .

In some cases, the Elections Office has determined that they need you to sign an Affirmation Form. They may have sent a letter to your address and it was returned. There may have been other situations that caused this step. All that is required is you will be requested to meet with the Election Judge, fill out a form that confirms your current address then you go back to the Poll Book staff.

Unusual Activity at your poll:

If you see something that you think may be wrong, politely say something to the Election Judge. A candidate for office may not stay in a polling place longer than it takes that candidate to vote. They may not distribute any trinkets or literature about their campaign while in the Voting Room. The Election Judge and/or staff will discard any trinkets or literature that was left in a voting booth.

Poll Books must be located within the voting room so that members of the Election Board staff who are managing the Poll Books is close to the two people managing the Number Books and the person distributing Ballots. Poll Books must be maintained by the Election Board staff at all times. They may not be scanned by voters to look at other names in the Poll Books.

Voting is a personal task and only one registered voter may be filling out a Ballot; but there are times when a voter may need help. In some cases, the voter has filed paperwork with the Election Office to permit a family member or friend to assist the voter. The person rendering the help may not be a Union Shop Steward nor the management of the voter's employer.

In some states during the last election, voters were told that they already voted. Some voters questioned the validity of that statement. If it happens to you, you want to talk politely with the Election Judge. Ask him/her to contact the Election office in Bellefonte. Remember that some of us are getting old and may have returned an Absentee or Mail-in Ballot. But if you know you didn't, you may request that the Election Office permits the Election Judge to issue a Provisional Ballot to you. You will be permitted to complete the Provisional Ballot, but it is returned to the Election Judge. He will return it to Bellefonte and provide information so you can check on how it was adjudicated. Your Provisional Ballot may have been accepted; but for several reasons, it may have been rejected. Let's hope that there is no need for a Provisional Ballot. But if one is given to you, follow the instructions given to you.

In Centre County each precinct is provided with a device that some folks with impairments can use to generate a substitute ballot. If you aren't sure, talk with the Election Judge of that Precinct. If you don't get satisfaction from the Judge, call one or more of the Centre County Commissioners (814) 355-6700. Tell them what you observed and ask what they plan to do. The Commissioners are:

Michael Pipe (D) Chair, Mark Higgins Vice-Chair (D), and Steve Dershem (R)

If the Precinct runs out of Republican ballots as they did during the 2021 Primary Election, you may want to take your observation to a higher office. After the 2021 Primary election, Commissioner Michael Pipe said he took full responsibility for the shortages of Republican ballots across the County. However, to the best of our knowledge, there were no consequences for his error. And there are State Guidelines for ordering the proper number of ballots for every precinct: for every Party during a Primary Election, and for every General Election.

If you spend some time at the Election Internet site, you will be prepared to know what the rules are, what to look for, and where to send your concerned observations.