

 

## BEING AN ELECTION OBSERVER: THINGS TO KNOW

Election observers are appointed by political parties, groups of candidates, or issue committees to observe the conduct of the election. That role is important and can help ensure accountability, but it also requires observers to refrain from interfering in the voting process. It is imperative that as an appointed observer you maintain a high level of respect for the voters, the elections process and election officials.

- No more than one observer may be appointed to an early vote center or Election Day precinct by an appointing authority.
- Observers are allowed to be in the polling location within certain prescribed times before, during, and after voting is complete.
- Observers must not interfere with election officials or poll workers doing their jobs or otherwise slow down the operation of the polling location, board of elections, or early vote center, nor may they interact with voters in a manner that interferes with or disrupts an election.
- There are two forms that must be completed for each of the six types of observers – a notice and certificate of appointment. These forms can be found at [OhioSoS.gov](#).
- All observers (except recount observers) must be qualified electors in the State of Ohio. However, observers do not need to be registered to vote in the particular county where they are appointed to observe.
- Uniformed officers or political candidates cannot serve as observers.

Every observer is required to take an oath prior to observing. The oath is prescribed by law as follows:

"You do solemnly swear that you will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties as an official observer, assigned by law; that you will not cause any delay to persons offering to vote; and/or that you will not disclose or communicate to any person how any elector has voted at such election."

The role of observers is limited to observing the proceedings of an election. Accordingly, while observers are permitted to watch and inspect, observers are NEVER permitted to handle any election materials.

Observers are permitted to move freely about the polling location or any area where ballots are being cast, processed, counted, or recounted at a board of elections office, as applicable, to the extent that they do not engage in any prohibited activity.

Observers may not enforce the law or advocate on behalf of voters. However, they may leave the voting area to contact the county board of elections to and share their concern.

Observers may NOT use any electronic or communication device or any recording device in any manner that impedes, interferes with, or disrupts an election, or in any way intimidates a voter, or risks violating the secrecy of the ballot or voter privacy. This includes taking pictures, video, and recording audio.

Observers using a cell phone or other communication device to discuss the election or a perceived problem with the administration of the election may NOT do so inside a polling location.

Although observers may freely move about the location at which they are observing, certain behavior is prohibited, including:

- Engaging in any kind of election campaigning;
- Hindering or delaying an elector in reaching or leaving the polling location;
- Impeding, interfering with, or disrupting the election in some manner;
- Intimidating, harassing, or attempting to influence voters or precinct election officials;
- Carrying a firearm or other deadly weapon; or
- Violating the secrecy of the ballot or the privacy of voters.

Again, observers may not serve as enforcers of the laws nor act as advocates for voters before the precinct election officials.

Precinct election officials must enforce the peace and good order in and about the polling location and are responsible for protecting official observers against being bothered or harmed while observing election processes.

Ohio law provides that election officials have a responsibility to remove observers from their posts for various reasons including behavior that interferes with, impedes, or disrupts an election.



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