

IX. Election Ballots

Ballot Proofing and Michigan Ballot Production Standards

All ballots must be prepared in conformance with Michigan's Ballots Production Standards. Adherence to the standards is compulsory for all election officials and vendors. A copy of the standards can be found on the Department of State's website.

Election ballots must always be carefully proofed to ensure that 1) they conform to all required legal and technical standards and 2) they are free of errors and omissions. The importance of the ballot proofing cannot be over emphasized!

County Election Commission's Responsibilities: Ballots prepared for use at federal, state and countywide elections and certain school district elections are printed by the authority of the County Election Commission.

Local Election Commission's Responsibilities: Ballots prepared for use at city, township, village and certain school district elections are printed by the authority of the City, Township or Village County Election Commission.

Before the ballots are printed, the printer returns copies of the ballots to the appropriate Election Commission. The Commission is responsible for checking the various proof ballots to make sure that they are free of errors and omissions. A comprehensive check should include a careful review of the following:

- Ballot heading including: 1) OFFICIAL BALLOT 2) election type 3) election date 4) county name, state 5) jurisdiction name and 6) precinct number
- Instructions - Will vary depending on election type
- Section headers – e.g.: PARTISAN SECTION, NONPARTISAN SECTION and PROPOSAL SECTION
- Office and proposal divisions – e.g.: STATE, COUNTY, CITY, TOWNSHIP
- Office titles – e.g.: CLERK, TREASURER, TRUSTEE
- Number to be elected – e.g.: Vote for not more than 1
- Placement of candidate names; form and spelling of candidate names; candidate name rotations; placement of special ballot designations
- Presentation and wording of ballot proposals

Proofing ballots is a tedious and time-consuming task – but the problems and embarrassment a complete proofing job can save on Election Day makes the task well worth the effort. If the Commission delegates ballot proofing to members of the clerk's staff, the task should be assigned to those in the office with the best eye for detail.

Responsibilities of Candidates and Department of State: Immediately after the proof ballots are delivered to the Election Commission, the forwards the proofs to the Department of State's Bureau of Elections in Lansing for approval. The Commission also sends each candidate a proof ballot which lists the candidate's name.

- After sending proof ballots prepared for a state election, the county clerk must sign an affidavit that attests that proof ballots were mailed as required. The affidavit must list the candidates to whom the ballots were mailed, the addresses to which the ballots were mailed, and the dates on which the ballots were mailed.
- The Department of State's Bureau of Elections inspects the form of the proof ballots received from each Election Commission. (The Bureau of Elections does *not* check candidate name spellings or that all required offices are on the ballot.) If the ballots are in the proper form, the Bureau of Elections grants its approval of the ballots; if the ballots are not in the proper form, the Bureau of Elections forwards the necessary corrections to the Commission. Candidates who receive a proof ballot have *two business days* after the receipt of the ballot to contact the county clerk with any necessary corrections.
- The Election Commission proceeds with the printing of a ballot if the Bureau of Elections grants its approval of the ballot and no corrections are received from candidates on the ballot within the two-day period allowed for name corrections. If errors or omissions are found on a ballot by the Bureau of Elections or a candidate, the Commission may not proceed with the printing of the ballot until the errors or omissions are corrected. If ballot corrections are required, a copy of the corrected ballot must be forwarded to the Bureau of Elections.

Final Inspection by the County Election Commission: After the ballots are printed, they are given a final inspection by the County Election Commission. If the ballots pass the final inspection, they are wrapped and delivered to the county clerk. The county clerk is then responsible for the delivery of the ballots to the local jurisdictions in the county. If convenient, the county clerk can arrange for the printer to send the ballots to the local jurisdictions. The printer must not ship ballots to local jurisdictions before the County Election Commission has inspected the ballots a final time. It is strongly recommended that the city or township clerk carefully inspect the ballots again after the ballots are received on the local level to make sure that the County Election Commission has not overlooked an error or omission on the ballot.

Correction of Ballot Errors and Omissions After Ballots are Printed: The objective of the ballot proofing procedures is, of course, to spot and correct all ballot errors and omissions before the ballots are printed. If a ballot error or omission is found after the ballots have been printed, the County Election Commission must decide whether there is time to reprint the ballots before the election. If it is determined that the reprinting of ballots is not feasible, the Michigan Department of State's Bureau of Elections should be contacted immediately for further instruction. It should be noted that a candidate can, under certain circumstances, petition for an election to be held again by mail if a ballot defect is found after the polls open on Election Day. (MCL 168.831-839)

Candidate Name Rotations

Michigan election law, MCL 168.569a, stipulates that candidate names must be rotated on the ballot in specified instances to eliminate the chance that a candidate may be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged in an election by his or her position on the ballot.

Under the rotation requirements, candidate names are rotated from one precinct to the next when rotation is required. If absent voter ballots are processed by absent voter counting boards, each ballot form which contains identical offices and names is considered a separate precinct for ballot rotation purposes. Exception: A unique ballot rotation is not required if absent voter ballots, which contain the position of *precinct delegate*, will be processed at an absent voter counting board. (See: Chapter VIII “Absent Voter Counting Boards” for additional information.)

When Rotation is Required: The following outlines when candidate names must be rotated on the ballot:

- Candidate names are rotated on ***non-partisan primary ballots and non-partisan general election ballots*** in cases where the number of candidates running for an office exceeds the number of candidates to be elected to the office. (If the number of candidates filing for a judicial office in a non-partisan primary is equal to or less than the number of candidates to be elected to the office, the office does not appear on the ballot. If the number of candidates filing for a city office in a non-partisan primary is equal to or less than the number of candidates to be elected to the office, the office does not appear on the ballot unless otherwise provided under the city charter. If the number of candidates appearing on the ballot in a non-partisan general election is equal to or less than the number of candidates to be elected to the office, the candidates’ names are listed alphabetically.)
- Candidate names are rotated on ***partisan primary ballots*** in cases where the number of candidates a party has running for an office exceeds the number of candidates to be elected to the office. (The names are listed alphabetically in cases where the number of candidates a party has running for an office is equal to or less than the number of candidates to be elected to the office.)
- Candidate names are *not* rotated on ***partisan general election ballots***. (In cases where there is more than one candidate to be elected to an office in a partisan general election, the candidates are listed alphabetically under the appropriate party column.)

Rotation Procedure: Candidate rotations are arranged by the printer and the election official responsible for printing the ballots. As a starting point, the candidates’ names are placed in alphabetical order. With each subsequent rotation, the name in the first position (top of column) is shifted to the last position (bottom of column). The rotations must be planned to ensure that the various precinct rotations are – to the extent possible – evenly distributed throughout the city, township or county.

Office Order

The following standards must be observed. Office titles must be printed in boldface uppercase type. The order in which offices appear on the ballot is specified under Michigan election law as detailed below. (MCL 168.570a, 697, 699)

PARTISAN BALLOT

State and Federal Offices

ELECTORS OF PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

(general election ballot only)

GOVERNOR AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (Lieutenant Governor - general election ballot only)

SECRETARY OF STATE

ATTORNEY GENERAL

UNITED STATES SENATOR

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS

STATE SENATOR

REPRESENTATIVE IN STATE LEGISLATURE

MEMBER OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

REGENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

TRUSTEE OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

GOVERNOR OF WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

County Offices

COUNTY EXECUTIVE (if elected in county)

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

SHERIFF

CLERK (if the office has not been combined with the office of Register of Deeds)

CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS (if the office of County Clerk and Register of Deeds has been combined)

TREASURER

REGISTER OF DEEDS (if office has not been combined with office of County Clerk)

AUDITOR (if elected in county)

MINE INSPECTOR (if elected in county)

COUNTY ROAD COMMISSIONER (if elected in county)

DRAIN COMMISSIONER

CORONER (if elected in county)

SURVEYOR (if elected in county)

COUNTY COMMISSIONER

City Offices (if elected on a partisan basis; order of offices is governed by the city charter)

Township Offices

SUPERVISOR

CLERK
TREASURER
TRUSTEE
CONSTABLE (if elected in township)
PARK COMMISSIONER (if elected in township)

Precinct Delegate Positions

DELEGATE TO COUNTY CONVENTION

NONPARTISAN BALLOT

Judicial Offices

JUSTICE OF SUPREME COURT
JUDGE OF COURT OF APPEALS
JUDGE OF CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE OF PROBATE COURT
JUDGE OF PROBATE DISTRICT COURT
JUDGE OF DISTRICT COURT
JUDGE OF MUNICIPAL COURT

City Offices (if elected on a non-partisan basis; order of offices is governed by the city charter)

Township Offices

TOWNSHIP LIBRARY BOARD DIRECTOR (if elected in township)

Village Offices

PRESIDENT
CLERK
TREASURER
TRUSTEE or COUNCIL (per village charter)
VILLAGE LIBRARY BOARD DIRECTOR (if elected in village)

School District and District Library Board Offices

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEMBER
COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBER
INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEMBER
DISTRICT LIBRARY BOARD MEMBER

Other Offices: Township Library Board Director, a non-partisan office, is placed after all judicial offices on optical scan ballots. Precinct delegate positions are placed after all other partisan offices. (Precinct delegate positions appear on the August primary ballot only.) The order and placement of city offices on a primary ballot are governed by the charter of the city involved in the primary.