



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
BUREAU OF ELECTIONS  
LANSING

## **BALLOT PROOFING -- ELECTION BALLOTS**

Election ballots printed must be carefully proofed to ensure that they 1) meet the ballot production standards issued through the Michigan Department of State's Bureau of Elections and 2) are free of errors and omissions. The ballot proofing procedures specified under Michigan election law are detailed below. The importance of the ballot proofing steps cannot be over emphasized!

### **Ballot Proofing Procedures: County Election Commission's Responsibilities**

Before the ballots are printed, the printer returns copies of the ballots to the County 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 format;
- offices on ballot and the placement of offices;
- district numbers (where applicable);
- number to be elected to each office;
- placement of candidate names;
- form and spelling of candidate names;
- candidate rotations;
- number of write-in lines provided under office;
- placement of special ballot designations;
- wording and placement 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 the county clerk's staff, the task should be assigned to the person in the office with the best eye for detail. Unfortunately, ballot errors are the most common – and serious – problems encountered on election day throughout the state. **Don't let it happen in your county!**

### **Ballot Proofing Procedures: Candidate's and Department of State's Responsibilities**

Immediately after the proof ballots are delivered to the County Election Commission, the Commission must forward the proof ballots in PDF format 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.

- 1) After sending proof ballots, 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.
- 2) The Department of State's Bureau of Elections inspects the form of the proof ballots received from each County Election Commission. (The Bureau of Elections does *not* check candidate name spellings; verify that all required offices are on the ballot; or proof the wording of proposals.) If the ballot forms meet the ballot production standards and are free of errors and omissions, the Bureau of Elections grants its approval of the ballots; if errors or omissions are found, 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.
- 3) The County 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 and Local Jurisdictions**

After the ballots are printed, they are given a final inspection by the County Election Commission (Note: this step may be delegated to County election staff by the 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 a ballot error or omission cannot be corrected by reprinting the ballots because of time constraints or other reasons, other remedial measures must be explored in consultation with the Michigan Department of State's Bureau of Elections. 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)