

# Election Protection: A Role for You at the Polls

Major changes to North Carolina's voting laws are taking effect – and the changes could cause long lines and confuse or even frighten voters. What can you do to help? In addition to preparing voters before they vote, you can serve in a crucial role at the polls on Election Day or during Early Voting. You will help voters in meaningful ways and gain a deeper understanding of the election process.

*Here are three roles you can perform at the polls to protect people's right to vote.*

## #1. WORK AS AN ELECTION OFFICIAL

### What is an Election Official?

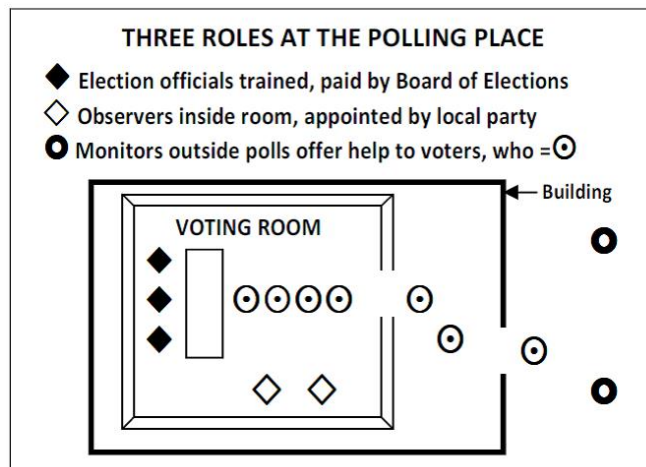
Sometimes called "poll workers," an election official is someone who works inside the polling place. They are paid a modest hourly rate and trained by the County Board of Elections. They make sure each eligible voter receives the correct ballot, answer questions, offer provisional ballots, and act as "judges" when challenges or conflicts arise.

There are **three types of election officials**. Their duties differ in small ways if they work at the polls during Early Voting or at a precinct polling place on Election Day. The County Board of Elections will explain the differences. The 3 types are:

The **Chief Judge** is the person ultimately responsible for what happens at the polling place. They manage other election officials, maintain an orderly environment at the polls, and are responsible for securing the ballots. They are appointed by the County Board of Elections for a two-year term in July or August of every odd-numbered year. There is one Chief Judge assigned to each polling place.

**Judges** work closely with the Chief Judge to administer the election. In the absence of a Chief Judge, a Judge may be promoted to serve as Chief Judge. Judges sign all official Election Day returns and serve on a panel (of the Chief Judge and two Judges) to hear cases of a voter challenged by another voter. They are appointed for a two-year term in the summer of odd-numbered years. There are two Judges per precinct polling place on Election Day, sometimes more for Early Voting polls.

**Assistants** are appointed as needed to assist at the polling place. They serve at the discretion of the Chief Judge and are typically appointed by the County Board about a month before an election. These officials play a



vital role in administering an accessible, fair, and secure election.

### Requirements for Election Officials

In order to work at a polling place, you must be (1) a registered voter who is a resident of the county and (2) able to read and write. You may not serve if you hold elected office, are a candidate for office, hold an office in a political party, or are a manager or treasurer for any candidate's campaign.

Election officials on Election Day must serve the full day, typically arriving before 6:30 AM and leaving after 7:30 PM – and they may not leave the voting place. Election officials who serve at polling places during Early Voting may work more flexible hours.

Generally, the Chief Judge is a member of the party of the governor, and each polling place should have a balanced number of judges from the two major political parties.

### How Do I Become an Election Official?

There are two routes.

**(1) Contact your local political party chairperson.** This is the primary route to become an election official on Election Day, even for *Unaffiliated voters*. State law gives the local Republican and Democratic parties the authority to recommend qualified voters as Election Day poll judges and requires the County Board of Elections to approve them unless they do not meet the requirements or the party chair misses the deadline. Check the Internet or directories for a local party's phone or call the state party in Raleigh for contacts: NC Republican Party: 919-828-6423; NC Democratic Party: 919-821-2777.

(2) **Contact your County Board of Elections.** The County Board of Elections is the entity that appoints, trains, and pays election officials. It can hire qualified voters for Election Day positions if the parties do not recommend enough people or to fill vacancies. The County Board also has the authority to hire election officials to serve at the Early Voting polling places, without a political party's involvement. See "My Election Board" on [www.ncsbe.gov](http://www.ncsbe.gov) or call toll-free 866-522-4723 for your County Board's contact info.

**Note:** To cover all the bases, contact *both* your local party chair and your County Board of Elections about your interest in being an election official. If you are an unaffiliated voter, you could consider contacting the chairs of any and all local parties.

## #2. SERVE AS A PARTISAN POLL OBSERVER

### What is a Poll Observer?

Poll observers monitor the voting process on behalf of a political party; they watch for irregularities or errors that may harm the party's (or the public's) interests and make sure voters affiliated with the party are able to vote. These partisan poll observers are seated *inside* the polling place. They are not election officials or judges.

Poll observers may **not** interfere with the voting process or watch a voter actually mark their ballot. They may not speak to voters or tell them how to vote. If they have a question or see a problem, they may speak with the Chief Judge. They may observe and take notes about anything that goes on at the polling place; no cameras are allowed. The information they record may be relevant in a lawsuit or protest about how the election was administered.

Poll observers may work for 4-hour shifts or longer, depending on the schedule arranged by the party chair. They are not paid for their service.

### How Do I Become a Poll Observer?

Any registered voter of a county is qualified to become a partisan poll observer. By law, the chair of each political party in the county (all parties, not just majority parties) may designate 2 observers per voting place and up to 10 at-large observers who may roam among the various voting locations. (*Note:* At no time may a party have more than 3 observers in a polling place.) Talk to the chair of your local political party about serving.

### When Are Poll Observers Appointed?

The local party chair must submit a list of people appointed as observers to the Chief Judge of a polling

place or to the County Board of Elections within 5 days of the election.

## #3. BE A NONPARTISAN POLL MONITOR

### What is a Nonpartisan Poll Monitor?

Nonpartisan poll monitors are unpaid volunteers who stand *outside* of polling places as a resource to voters who may have problems. Partisan and nonpartisan groups sometimes sponsor poll monitors. They are not appointed by the elections board and do not need to be registered voters. Often they have a sign, shirt, or other indication that they are an "Election Protection" volunteer, available to help if a voter has a question or a problem voting.

Poll monitors keep an eye out for voters in distress, record problems, and do their best to make sure that all eligible voters are able to cast a ballot. Election Protection volunteers with Democracy North Carolina receive training, resource materials, a form to record incidents, and a hotline to call for answers and support.

Examples of problems include: election officials not providing the voter a provisional ballot or asking for an ID inappropriately; voters confused about where to vote or believing they received the wrong ballot or discriminatory treatment. Careful records of such incidents may help the lawsuits challenging the redistricting maps and the changes in voter rules.

### How Do I Become a Poll Monitor?

Most nonpartisan organizations that do poll monitoring will begin looking for volunteers several weeks before an election. You may contact Democracy North Carolina at any time to indicate you want to be an Election Protection volunteer monitor at the polls.

**QUESTIONS? Contact Democracy North Carolina at [info@democracync.org](mailto:info@democracync.org) or 919-286-6000. For more information, please visit [www.democracy-nc.org](http://www.democracy-nc.org) or [www.NCVoter.org](http://www.NCVoter.org).**



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