

# Alabama Ballot Proofing

## WHAT IS BALLOT PROOFING AND WHY SHOULD WE DO IT?

The process of producing a ballot is complex. County election officials do their best to make sure they have listed every contest and every candidate correctly. But **mistakes happen**. Ballot proofing helps catch mistakes before official ballots are printed. And that's important because mistakes caught after ballots are printed often cannot be fixed. Ballot proofing is therefore one of many tools to ensure that election results accurately reflect voter intent.

So who does this proofing? County officials will proof each ballot before sending it to the printer, but **you have a role to play too**. The more eyes on the near-final version of the ballot, the better. You should feel free to invite staff, voter protection volunteers, and others to participate.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO PROOF A BALLOT?

Not long. It will take one person a few minutes per ballot to perform a complete review. Because mistakes are usually noticed by a fresh set of eyes, consider bringing in a second person to review.

## HOW DO WE PARTICIPATE IN THE PROOFING PROCESS?

In Alabama, state law does not require that counties send near-final versions of the ballot to candidates to review, but counties are **permitted** to do so. So start by asking the county election commission (sometimes referred to as the "appointing board"). The election commission usually consists of the circuit clerk, the sheriff, the registrar, and the probate judge.<sup>1</sup> The other thing to keep in mind is that county party chairs often attend election commission meetings. So work with them to better understand how you can participate.

Remember, each county handles the proofing process differently and so you should reach out to any target counties now to confirm their process, including the date you could expect to receive a ballot to review.

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1 [Ala. Code § 17-1-2\(1\)](#).

## WHEN DOES THE PROCESS START?

The process in Alabama will likely start in August and the turnaround time will be quick. The Secretary of State must certify to each probate judge those candidates to appear on ballots in the probate judge's county by August 29<sup>2</sup> and some sample ballots will be released by September 4.<sup>3</sup> This means counties will likely have already started preparing the ballot layout by the time the state certifies names. At the latest, **you should contact counties by early August so you know what to expect.**

## HOW SHOULD WE REPORT ERRORS OR OMISSIONS?

Work with the county to find the best way. If county party chairs sit on the election commission in the relevant county, as is often the case in Alabama, that may be your best point of contact. In all cases, make sure to follow up on any emails with a phone call to confirm receipt and next steps.

## OTHER THAN ITEMS ON THE PROOFING CHECKLIST, IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC TO ALABAMA THAT WE SHOULD BE LOOKING FOR?

Alabama allows straight-party voting so there will be boxes on the top of the ballot where a voter can fill an oval next to "Alabama Democratic Party" or "Alabama Republican Party." Doing so means that the voter has voted for every candidate on the ballot designated as the nominee of the selected party.

Candidate names will appear with Democratic candidates first and Republican candidates second (by law, party candidates are listed in alphabetical order by party).<sup>4</sup>

The contests will be listed as follows:

1. President;
2. United States Senator;
3. United States Representative;
4. Supreme Court Justice; and
5. Other county and local offices.<sup>5</sup>

[Here](#) is a 2016 sample ballot from Montgomery County. Other 2016 sample ballots are available [here](#).

For more information on how the ballot will appear, review pages 189-190 of the 2019-20 Election Handbook [here](#).

## CONNECT WITH US!

Have questions? Need help?  
Please reach out to us at:

[ballotquestions@digidems.com](mailto:ballotquestions@digidems.com)

<sup>2</sup> [Ala. Code § 17-9-3\(b\)](#) (Note: the statute requires certification 74 days before the general election, but due to the date of this year's Republican National Convention, the deadline has been pushed to 66 days before the general election. See [ACT #2020-39](#)).

<sup>3</sup> [Ala. Code § 21-4-23\(b\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Ala. Code § 17-6-24](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Ala. Code § 17-6-25](#).