

# Michigan 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 Michigan, every candidate **has a right to participate** in the proofing process. But **you must complete your proofing quickly**. Each County Election Supervisor will send each candidate a ballot proof (a near-final, pre-print version of the ballot) in late August or early September. Ballot proofs are sent in PDF format. Candidates have **two business days** after receipt of ballot proof to contact the county clerk with proposed corrections.<sup>1</sup>

Each county also sends a ballot proof to the State Bureau of Elections for review. Note: The State checks the overall layout and ensures compliance with ballot production standards; it does **not** verify that all names are spelled correctly, that all offices are listed, or that all ballot proposals are typed correctly. That is the responsibility of the candidates and the counties. Printing of ballots does not begin until the (1) State approves the ballot **and** (2) the two-day window for

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1 [M.C.L. § 168.711](#).

candidate review has closed without any proposed corrections. If ballot corrections are proposed, the County prepares a new proposed final version and sends it to the State.

Keep in mind that 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 should expect to receive a ballot to review.

## WHEN DOES THE PROCESS START?

Ballot proofs are usually sent to candidates **between late August and early September**. Reach out to any relevant counties now to ask them to confirm when they will be sending you a ballot. And if you haven't heard from a county by September 7, be sure to contact them.

## HOW SHOULD WE REPORT ERRORS OR OMISSIONS?

Notify the county immediately, and no later than two business days after receipt of the ballot proof, of any errors or omissions. Candidates are encouraged to email suggested changes to the counties "with the corrections noted on the ballot."<sup>2</sup> Candidates are also encouraged to follow up with each county via phone.

If errors are found after the official ballots are printed, reprinting is possible, but only if the County Election Commission deems it feasible to do so. If errors are found on Election Day, candidates may petition for the election to be re-run.<sup>3</sup>

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

In Michigan, Democratic Party candidates are listed first, Republican Party candidates are listed second, and candidates from all other minor parties follow. (By law, the nominees from the same party as the current Secretary of State are to be listed first on each ballot.<sup>4</sup>)

The offices should appear in the following order: President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Senator, State Rep., and other county and local offices.<sup>5</sup>

## CONNECT WITH US!

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

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

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2 [M.C.L. § 168.711.](#)

3 [M.C.L. § 168.831](#); *see also* [M.C.L. § 168.712.](#)

4 [M.C.L. § 168.703.](#)

5 [M.C.L. § 168.697.](#)