

# Pennsylvania 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 Pennsylvania, 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 how to get involved.

Note that Pennsylvania law does require that County Boards of Elections make sample ballots available, but not early enough. (County Boards must have sample ballots on file for public inspection 5 days before each election. County Boards must also, if requested, provide 3 sample ballots to each candidate 5 days before the primary election and provide 2 sample ballots to each county party chair 5 days before the general election.<sup>1</sup>) Therefore you should not rely on this statutory provision and should instead work with counties to obtain near-final, pre-print versions weeks earlier.

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1 [25 P.S. § 2968.](#)

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.

## WHEN DOES THE PROCESS START?

The process in Pennsylvania will likely start in August. Ballots will need to be finalized by early to mid-September as early voting begins on September 14. (Separately, each County Board must submit a specimen ballot to the Department of State no later than September 29.)<sup>2</sup> At the latest, **you should contact counties by early August so you know what to expect.**

## HOW SHOULD WE REPORT ERRORS OR OMISSIONS?

In Pennsylvania, there are informal and formal mechanisms to ensure that mistakes are corrected. If you discover an error or omission, you should first attempt to notify the county via email of the problem and your proposed correction. So long as you timely notify the County Board of Elections, they will likely correct the error promptly. If for any reason the Board does not correct the error, any voter of the county may seek a judicial remedy to correct a “mistake or omission [that] has occurred in the printing of official ballots.”<sup>3</sup> The petition should be filed with “the court of common pleas of the proper county” or any judge on that court.<sup>4</sup> The court or the judge may then “require the county board of elections to correct the mistake or omission” or to “show cause” why they should not have to do so.<sup>5</sup>

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

Candidates should be listed in order of the number of votes received by the gubernatorial candidate of the same party in the preceding election.<sup>6</sup> (In 2020, Democratic candidates should therefore be listed first.)

## 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 [Election Preparation Checklist](#) (at 2).

3 [25 P.S. § 2970.](#)

4 [25 P.S. § 2970.](#)

5 [25 P.S. § 2970.](#)

6 [25 P.S. § 2963.](#)