

How to Run for Office in Massachusetts



Published by

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Introduction

The information in this guide is general information regarding the process for running for office in state primaries and elections in Massachusetts. This information is not intended as legal advice. Please note that deadlines and qualifications contained herein are subject to change if state laws are changed.

Procedures for running in local elections may vary. If you are considering becoming a municipal candidate, please contact your local election official for information applicable to your city or town.

Candidate's Resources

Massachusetts General Laws,
Chapters 50 - 56 are available
in local libraries and on the internet at
www.malegislature.gov

Regulations for certifying signatures:
950 CMR §55.00*

State Ethics Commission
One Ashburton Place, Room 619
Boston, MA 02108
617-371-9500

The Office of Campaign and Political Finance
One Ashburton Place, Room 411
Boston, MA 02108
617-979-8300 or 1-800-462-OCPF

“Don't Just Stand There...RUN!”*

“Election Day Legal Summary”*

“Residence for Voting Purposes”*

“Objections Before the State
Ballot Law Commission”*

Voter Registration and
Absentee Voting Information*

* These materials are available from the
Elections Division or the State Bookstore,
State House, Boston, MA 02133
617-727-2834



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Definitions

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Certificate of Voter Registration</i> | A certificate issued by the local election officials of a non-party candidate's city or town, which certifies that the candidate is a registered voter at their current address, and that the candidate has not been a member of a political party throughout the ninety days prior to the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. |
| <i>Congress</i> | A term used to describe the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, collectively. This term is sometimes used to refer specifically to the House of Representatives. |
| <i>County Office</i> | A public office that is filled by a vote of the registered voters in one of the fourteen counties in Massachusetts. All fourteen counties elect a sheriff, clerk of courts, and a register of probate. Some counties also elect a county treasurer and/or county commissioners. |
| <i>District Office</i> | A public office filled by a vote of the registered voters within a particular district of the state. Districts may include more than one municipality or part of a municipality. District offices include Governor's Councillors, State Senators, State Representatives, District Attorneys, Registers of Deeds, and Representatives in Congress. |
| <i>Enrollment Certificate</i> | A certificate issued by the local election officials of a party candidate's city or town, which certifies that the candidate is a registered voter at their current address, and that the candidate meets the party enrollment requirements for the office they seek. |
| <i>Ethics Receipt</i> | A receipt given to the candidate by the State Ethics Commission, upon submission of the candidate's Statement of Financial Interest. Ethics receipts must be submitted to the Secretary of the Commonwealth by the filing deadline, in order for a candidate to qualify for ballot access. Federal candidates are exempt from this requirement. |
| <i>Federal Office</i> | A public office that elected by the registered voters of a state or district to represent the voters in the United States government. Federal offices include Senator in Congress, Representative in Congress, and Electors of President and Vice President. |
| <i>General Court</i> | The official name of the Massachusetts state legislature. Members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives are referred to as Representatives in General Court, while members of the Massachusetts Senate are Senators in General Court. |
| <i>Local Election Officials</i> | The Board of Registrars or Board of Election Commissioners in each city or town. In most towns, the office of the local election official is the town clerk's office. |
| <i>Non-Party Candidate</i> | A candidate for public office who is not enrolled in any recognized political party in Massachusetts. Non-party candidates may be unenrolled |

– commonly referred to as “independent” – or they may be registered with a political designation. Non-party candidates must not have been enrolled in any political party throughout the ninety days prior to the first filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Party Candidate

A candidate for public office who is enrolled in a recognized political party in Massachusetts. Party candidates must have been enrolled in the party whose nomination they seek throughout the ninety days prior to the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Party candidates must not have been enrolled in any other party for one year prior to the same filing deadline.

Political Designation

Sometimes referred to as a “minor party,” political designations do not hold primaries. At least 50 registered voters must petition to form a political designation. The phrase “political designation” may also refer to the designation of not more than three words, by which a non-party candidate may choose to appear next to their name on the ballot.

Political Party

An officially recognized political group, which holds a primary election to nominate candidates to run in a state election. In Massachusetts, political parties must have received at least 3% of the total number of votes cast for a statewide office at the previous biennial state election, or must have at least 1% of the number of registered voters in Massachusetts enrolled in their party. Contact the Elections Division for a list of current political parties.

State Election

A general election, in which registered voters choose people to fill public offices and vote on ballot questions, where applicable. Biennial state elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November in every even-numbered year.

State Primary

A primary election, in which registered voters nominate party candidates. The names of the winners of the party primaries are placed upon the state election ballot. Biennial state primaries are usually held in early September of every even-numbered year.

Statement of Public Office

A statement that may appear on state primary ballots beside a candidate’s name, which lists public offices that the candidate holds or have held, but may be no longer than eight words. See page 9 for more information on statements of public office.

Statewide Office

A public office filled by a vote of the registered voters of the entire Commonwealth. Statewide offices include Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Treasurer, Auditor, and Senator in Congress.

Unenrolled

A registered voter who is not enrolled in any political party or political designation is an unenrolled voter. Such voters are commonly referred to as “Independents.” An unenrolled voter may qualify to have their name printed on the ballot only as a non-party candidate.

Written Acceptance

The signature of the candidate or an attorney authorized in writing by the candidate, which signifies the candidate’s acceptance of the nomination.

Getting On The Ballot

Most candidates for election in November file nomination papers in order to have their names printed on the ballot. Most often, candidates gain access to the general election ballot in one of the following two ways:

- A candidate who is a member of a party may be nominated in a state primary; **OR**
- A non-party candidate may run in the state election only.

Please be aware that you may only qualify in only one of the above ways. A candidate must fulfill specific enrollment requirements when running for office.

For each office, state law has assigned a minimum number of certified signatures required for ballot access. For example, candidates for state representative must submit at least 150 certified signatures, while candidates for state senator are required to submit at least 300 certified signatures. For a complete listing of signature requirements, please see the chart on page 13.

Candidates may also have their names printed on the state election ballot by being nominated in the state primary through a write-in or sticker campaign, or by being nominated by a party to fill a vacancy caused by a withdrawal of a candidate.

Party Enrollment Requirements

Candidates who wish to run in a political party primary must have been enrolled in that party throughout the ninety days preceding the deadline for filing nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Additionally, party candidates may not have been enrolled in any other political party for one year prior to the last day for filing nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Candidates who wish to run as non-party candidates in the State Election only must not have been enrolled in any political party throughout the ninety days preceding the first deadline for filing nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth for the office being sought. When the deadline for submitting nomination papers differs for party and non-party candidates, the earlier deadline shall be used to calculate the deadline to un-enroll from a party.

Nomination Papers

Availability

Nomination papers are available from the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth in his Boston, Fall River, and Springfield offices, and may be picked up or requested by telephone or in writing. Nomination papers may also be available in certain city or town halls throughout the Commonwealth. Contact the Elections Division for a full list of locations where nomination papers are available.

For biennial state elections and primaries, nomination papers are made available no later than 15 weeks prior to the first filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Nomination papers are usually available by mid-February of each election year, though they may be released earlier, at the discretion of the Secretary. The Elections Division can provide specific release dates for nomination papers, as the release date approaches.

Nomination papers for party candidates are **white** in color, while nomination papers for non-party candidates are **yellow**. Candidates should ensure that they have chosen the correct nomination papers before gathering signatures.

Candidates may make **exact copies** of the official nomination papers for gathering signatures. Papers that have been altered in any way, including papers that are not printed two-sided, will not be accepted. **If possible, it is recommended that candidates file early – prior to the deadline for submitting papers to local registrars. This allows time for errors to be identified, and for candidates to gather additional signatures, if necessary.**

Required Information

The candidate's name, residence, political party or designation, the office for which the candidate is running, and the district in which they are running must be placed on the nomination papers **BEFORE** any signatures are gathered. These areas of the nomination papers are highlighted in gray. If any information is missing from the gray areas of the paper, **no signatures on these papers can be counted**. The candidate's residence must include the candidate's street name and number, if any, and some identifiable reference to the city or town. To avoid confusion, this Office recommends using the full name of the city or town in which the candidate resides.

Who May Sign

Signatures on nomination papers must be those of registered voters in the candidate's district. If a candidate is running in a party primary, only voters who are members of the candidate's political party or members of no party (unenrolled or political designations) may sign that candidate's nomination papers. Those running as non-party candidates may collect signatures from all registered voters in their districts.

Signing for Someone Else

Voters who are prevented by physical disability from signing on their own behalf may authorize another individual to sign for them, **in the voter's presence**. No person may sign for another, unless the voter is physically disabled. A spouse may not sign for their spouse.

Signing Once Per Candidate

Voters may sign once for each candidate for an office. If a voter signs more than once for the same candidate, that voter's name will be certified only once; additional signatures will be disallowed. Voters may sign for as many different candidates as they wish, even for the same office.

Collecting Signatures

Each nomination paper should contain signatures of registered voters from only **ONE** city or town. At least three registrars or election commissioners of the city or town where the signers are registered must certify that each signature is that of a registered voter in their jurisdiction. Names from other communities on that sheet

will be disallowed. If a candidate is running in a district which crosses city or town lines, separate nomination papers should be circulated and submitted to each community.

Candidates should collect more signatures than required, as many signatures are likely to be disallowed in the certification process. Further signatures may be disallowed through challenges. Each local election official is required by law to certify two-fifths more than the number of signatures required.

Certification of Signatures

To be certified by local election officials, all signatures on nomination papers must be legible, signed in-person, and signed substantially as registered. Signers must include the residential address at which they are registered to vote. A signature cannot be certified if the voter provides a mailing address, post office box, or an address at which they are not registered to vote.

State law requires that voters sign “substantially as registered.” According to state regulations, this includes the omission or insertion of a middle name or initial. A married voter should be sure to sign her own name, rather than Mrs. John Smith. Signers should not use nicknames or initials in place of given names, unless they are registered as such. Voters who are unsure of how they are registered may sign in different ways on consecutive lines (with addresses on each line). The local election official will certify only the valid name and address.

The law directs local election officials to certify a signature if they can reasonably determine the identity of the voter from the form of the signature; however, to avoid legal objections it is wise to consult a list of voters, so that voters may be sure they are signing as registered. Lists of voters may be obtained from the local election officials of each city and town.

Requesting Review of Uncertified Signatures

Local election officials must complete certification of nomination papers at least seven days before the deadline for filing the papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. If the total number of signatures certified by the local election officials is less than 10% in excess of the number required for the office that the candidate seeks, the candidate may request a review by the local election officials of the signatures not certified.

Requests for review of signatures not certified by the local election officials must be submitted to the local election officials no later than 48 hours after the deadline for registrars to complete certification. A list of those signatures must be presented to the local election officials, who must complete their review no later than 24 hours before the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Please note that candidates may only request a review of signatures not certified if the nomination papers have not been removed from the office of the local election officials.

Written Acceptance

In order to have their names placed on the ballot, candidates must file a written acceptance of the nomination with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Candidates may sign in the space provided on the nomination papers, below the gray boxes. Please note that only one written acceptance is required – candidates may sign more than one nomination paper, but it is not necessary to sign every sheet.

The written acceptance must be submitted to the Secretary of the Commonwealth no later than the last day and hour for filing nomination papers. The written acceptance is not required to be filed with local registrars.

Candidates who are unable to sign their written acceptance may authorize an attorney to do it for them.

Ethics Receipt

Candidates must file with their nomination papers a receipt from the State Ethics Commission, which proves that they have filed a statement of financial interest with that agency. The receipt from the State Ethics Commission must be filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth by the deadline for filing nomination papers.

Candidates may obtain forms, instructions and additional information about the statement of financial interest from the State Ethics Commission, which may be contacted at:

One Ashburton Place, Room 619
Boston, Massachusetts 02108
617.371.9500

OCPF Receipt

Candidates for statewide office must submit with their nomination papers a receipt from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance. This receipt verifies whether or not the candidate has agreed to campaign spending limits. This requirement applies only to candidates for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Treasurer and Receiver General, and Auditor. Contact information for the Office of Campaign and Political Finance may be found on page 2.

Enrollment Certificates

In order to qualify for the ballot, all candidates must submit either an enrollment certificate or a certificate of voter registration. Party candidates must submit an enrollment certificate, upon which the local election officials certify that the candidate is a registered voter and meets the party enrollment requirements. Non-party candidates submit a certificate of voter registration, upon which the local election officials certify that the candidate is a registered voter and meets the requirements for running as a non-party candidate.

Enrollment certificates and certificates of voter registration may be obtained from the local election officials in the candidate's home town or city. Blank certificates are printed on the nomination papers and must contain the signatures or stamps of at least three registrars. It is advisable to obtain extra certificates from the registrars' office.

Statements On The Ballot

Party candidates running in the State Primary may include on the ballot a statement of public office, not to exceed eight words. This statement may list any public offices the candidate holds or has previously held, as well as the words "veteran," or in the case of elected incumbents, "Candidate for Re-nomination." The only such statement that appears on the State Election ballot is the phrase "Candidate for Re-election," which is required by law to be printed beside the name of every elected incumbent.

Not every government employee holds a “public office.” Holders of public office must have entrusted to them in some degree the exercise of the power of authority of government. The duties must not be merely clerical, but must involve the exercise of some significant discretion or judgment. Additionally, if the candidate is not currently holding the office, the statement must include the word “former” before the public office. Furthermore, the position must be one which is established by law, but must not be merely advisory in nature. Please note that a political party position, such as town, ward, or state committee member is not a public office.

Non-party candidates may express a political designation in no more than three words, which will appear next to the candidate’s name on the ballot. Political designations may contain any three words, as long as those words do not include the name of an official political party. If a political designation is to be used, it must be included in the gray area provided on every nomination paper that is circulated. Papers with differing political designations shall be tallied as separate filings. Candidates who leave the political designation box on their nomination papers blank shall go on the ballot as “unenrolled.”

Objections

A candidate’s eligibility may be challenged before the State Ballot Law Commission. While there are many reasons for challenging eligibility, past challenges have included: forged signatures on nomination papers, candidates not meeting the legal requirements for the offices they sought, and signers not being registered voters.

A candidate’s nomination may be challenged by any registered voter of the district within three days following the deadline for filing nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Written objections to nominations must be filed with the State Ballot Law Commission at the Secretary of the Commonwealth’s Elections Division. For details, please see “Objections Before the State Ballot Law Commission,” a publication available from the Elections Division.

When an objection is filed, the candidates receive notice in writing that a hearing will be held before the State Ballot Law Commission. It is advisable to have an attorney present, since the hearing often involves technical requirements. The Elections Division can provide further information about the procedure.

Penalties

The law provides for a penalty of not more than \$50 for subscribing falsely to a statement on a primary nomination paper. The act of falsely or willfully altering the designation of the district after signatures have been certified, or for falsely making or willfully altering, defacing, mutilating, destroying, suppression or unlawfully signing, or filing a nomination paper is punishable by a fine of not more than \$1000 or imprisonment for not more than one year.

Calendar

Event

Deadlines

| | Party and Non-Party Candidates for District and County Offices | Party Candidates For Federal and Statewide Offices | Non-Party Candidates for Federal and Statewide Offices |
|---|--|--|--|
| <i>Nomination papers must be available</i> | <i>15 weeks prior to the first filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth</i> | | |
| Last day for a person running in a state primary to enroll in a party or for a person running only in a state election to unenroll from a party. | 91 days prior to the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth | | |
| <i>5 p.m. Last day and hour to submit nomination papers to Registrars of Voters for certification of signatures.</i> | <i>4 weeks prior to the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth</i> | | |
| 5 p.m. Last day and hour for Registrars of Voters to complete certification of signatures. | 1 week before the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth | | |
| 5 p.m. Last day and hour for candidates to apply for review of non-certified signatures. | 48 hours after the last day to file with the Registrars. | | |
| 5 p.m. Last day and hour for Registrars of Voters to complete review of non-certified signatures. | 24 hours before the final hour for filing said papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. | | |
| <i>5 p.m. Last day and hour to file nomination papers (including party enrollment or voter registration certification and Ethics Commission receipt) with Secretary of the Commonwealth.</i> | <i>Last Tuesday in May</i> | <i>First Tuesday in June</i> | <i>Last Tuesday in August</i> |
| 5 p.m. Last day and hour for filing withdrawals of or objections to nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. | 72 hours after the filing deadline with the Secretary of the Commonwealth | | |
| 5 p.m. Last day and hour for filling vacancies caused by withdrawals. | 72 weekday hours from the last day and hour to file withdrawals. | | |

9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Last day to register to vote and to change party enrollment for the state primaries (except in towns with fewer than 1,500 voters, where registration sessions must be held from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

20 days prior to the State Primaries

STATE PRIMARIES**7 weeks prior to the State Election**

5 p.m. Last day and hour to file withdrawals of or objections to nominations made at the state primaries.

6 days after the State Primaries

5 p.m. Last day and hour to fill vacancies caused by withdrawals made after the state primaries.

3 days after the deadline to object or withdraw

5 p.m. Last day and hour for write-in candidates who were nominated at the state primaries to file a written acceptance of nomination.

13 days after the State Primaries

9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Last day to register to vote and to change party enrollment for the state election (except in towns with fewer than 1,500 voters, where registration sessions must be held from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

20 days prior to the State Election

STATE ELECTION**First Tuesday after the first Monday of November**

*All deadlines are subject to change

Age, Residence and Signature Requirements to Run for Office

- ★ You must be at least 18 years old
(*exceptions: U.S. Representative – 25 years old, U.S. Senate – 30 years old*)
- ★ You must be a registered voter in Massachusetts.
- ★ You must fulfill the residence and signature requirements below.

| Office | Term | Signatures Required | Residency Requirement |
|---|---------|--------------------------------------|--|
| FOR FEDERAL OFFICE | | | |
| President and Vice President ¹ | 4 Years | 2,500 (Primary) 10,000 (Election) | Must have been a resident of the United States for 14 years. |
| Senator in Congress ² | 6 Years | 10,000 | Must be an inhabitant of Massachusetts when elected. |
| Representative in Congress ³ | 2 Years | 2,000 | Must be an inhabitant of Massachusetts when elected. |
| FOR STATEWIDE OFFICE | | | |
| Governor | 4 Years | 10,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 7 years when elected. |
| Lieutenant Governor | 4 Years | 10,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 7 years when elected. |
| Attorney General ⁴ | 4 Years | 10,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 5 years when elected. |

¹ = Must be a natural born citizen and at least 35 years of age.

² = Must have been a United States citizen for 9 years and at least 30 years of age.

³ = Must have been a United States citizen for 7 years and at least 25 years of age.

⁴ = Must be a member of the Massachusetts Bar.

| Office | Term | Signatures Required | Residency Requirement |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|--|
| Secretary of the Commonwealth | 4 Years | 5,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 5 years when elected. |
| Treasurer and Receiver General | 4 Years | 5,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 5 years when elected. |
| Auditor | 4 Years | 5,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 5 years when elected. |

FOR DISTRICT AND COUNTY OFFICE

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|----------------------|--|
| Governor's Council | 2 Years | 1,000 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 5 years when elected. |
| Senator in General Court | 2 Years | 300 | Must have been a resident of Massachusetts for 5 years and an inhabitant of the district when elected. |
| Representative in General Court | 2 Years | 150 | Must have been a resident of the district for one year when elected. |
| Sheriff | 6 Years | 1,000 ^{3,4} | None |
| District Attorney ² | 4 Years | 1,000 | Must be a resident of the district. |
| Register of Deeds | 6 Years | 1,000 ^{3,4} | Must be a resident of the district. |
| Register of Probate | 6 Years | 1,000 ^{3,4} | None |
| Clerk of Courts | 6 Years | 1,000 ^{3,4} | None |
| County Treasurer | 6 Years | 1,000 ^{3,4} | Must be a resident of the county. |
| County Commissioner ¹ | 4 Years | 1,000 ^{3,4} | None |

¹ = or Franklin Council of Governments Executive Committee

² = Must be a member of the Massachusetts Bar.

³ = In Barnstable, Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire counties, 500 signatures are required.

⁴ = In Dukes and Nantucket counties, 25 signatures are required.

Campaign Finance

Reporting Contributions and Expenditures

The law requires that campaign expenses and contributions be reported by candidates seeking election at every level of government. The Director of the Office of Campaign and Political Finance is responsible for receiving and maintaining records for all candidates in the primaries and election, except candidates for federal office. Candidates for state office may obtain detailed information on reporting procedures, dates and other guidance regarding the campaign finance law from the Director of the Office of Campaign and Political Finance. That office may be reached at:

One Ashburton Place, Room 411
Boston, MA 02108.
(617) 979-8300 or 1-800-462-OCPF
ocpf@cpf.state.ma.us

Candidates for federal office file with the Federal Election Commission:

999 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20463
1-800-424-9530.

Keep Records Complete

All candidates and political committees must record money or other things of value received from all sources, and all expenditures and disbursements must be reported and detailed records kept. Laws relating to campaign contributions and expenses are quite detailed and explicit and must be followed carefully.

Special Elections

Candidates running in special elections must meet all of the same requirements as those in regular biennial state elections, though often with less time to do so. This section contains information specific to special election candidates. Unless otherwise stated here, all information in the previous section of this booklet applies to special election candidates.

Offices filled by special election:

- **Senator in Congress** – The Governor appoints an interim U.S. Senator to serve until a special election is held. The Governor shall call a special election within 145-160 days of the date the vacancy occurs.
- **Representative in Congress** – The Governor shall call a special election to be held between 145-160 days of the date the vacancy occurs.
- **Senator in General Court** – The Senate may vote to call a special election to fill a vacancy in their body.
- **Representative in General Court** – The Speaker of the House may call for a special election to fill any vacancies.

Election Dates

This section of the guide is intended for use by candidates running in special elections to fill vacancies in the U.S. Senate, U.S. House, State Senate and State House of Representatives. Once a special election has been called, a calendar containing the pertinent dates will be available from the Elections Division. Contact the Elections Division for the appropriate calendar at: 617-727-2828 or 1-800-462-VOTE (8683).

Each special state primary election for state senator and state representative is held four weeks prior to the special state election. Each special state primary election for United States Senator or Representative in Congress is held six weeks prior to the special state election. These dates are subject to change by the state legislature.

Nomination Papers

Nomination papers are usually available from the Elections Division soon after a special election has been called. In the case of district elections, nomination papers are often also available in a city or town hall within the district where the special election is taking place. Contact the Elections Division for more information on when and where papers will be available.

Nomination papers for special elections are essentially the same as those for biennial state elections, with the exception that the office and district names are pre-filled in the gray areas. As with all nomination papers, the gray areas of special election nomination papers must be filled out entirely, prior to circulation. Any missing information may invalidate the petition and prevent the signatures upon that petition from being counted.

Nomination papers for party candidates are white, while nomination papers for non-party candidates are yellow. Candidates should ensure that they have chosen the correct nomination papers before they leave the office.

Submission deadlines for candidates for Representative in General Court and Senator in General Court will be the same for all candidates, regardless of party enrollment status; submission deadlines for non-party can-

didates for Representative in Congress and Senator in Congress will be later for non-party candidates than for party candidates. Filing deadlines for all candidates for special elections will be listed on the special election calendar available from the Elections Division.

Please see page 6 for more information on the requirements for nomination papers.

Party Enrollment

Candidates who wish to run for a political party's nomination in a state primary must have been an enrolled member of that party throughout the 90 days prior to the deadline for submitting nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Party candidates shall not have been enrolled in any other political party for one year prior to that same deadline.

Non-party candidates must not have been enrolled in any party throughout the ninety days prior to the first deadline for filing nomination papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Often, the deadline for enrolling or un-enrolling from a political party falls prior to the date that a special election is called. Candidates you are unsure of their party enrollment status should consult their local election officials. It is advisable to contact the Elections Division with any questions about changing party enrollment prior to an election.

Requesting Review Of Uncertified Signatures

While candidates running in biennial state primaries and elections may request a review of signatures not certified by the Board of Registrars, state law does not allow for this process with nomination papers for special elections. It is therefore especially important that candidates collect more signatures than required and submit them well before the deadline.

Candidate's Check List

- Be certain you are a registered voter in the district from which you plan to run.
- Check the deadline for filing nomination papers for the office you seek in the calendar on page 12 and in the special section "Nomination Papers" on page 7.
- Review the election calendar on pages 12–13. Note the days and dates carefully; consider holidays.
- Obtain white nomination papers to run in the primary, or yellow, or beige to run as a non-party candidate in the election. **Fill in the top portion of nomination papers carefully with name and address (including street name and number and city or town), office, district, party or political designation, etc., BEFORE** you circulate the papers. Any nomination paper filed without this information will not be counted (gray areas on nomination papers).
- Be sure to sign the written acceptance line on a number of your nomination papers. For primary papers, fill in your statement of public offices you hold or have held if you wish to do so.
- Don't miss the deadline date for submitting nomination papers to local election officials for certification. The deadlines for candidates for federal and statewide office are later than those for candidates for other offices; check both sets of deadline dates carefully. Try to get papers to local local election officials earlier than the deadline if possible.
- Submit more than the required number of signatures to your local election officials for certification. If many signatures are challenged or disallowed, you may fall short of the required number. Be sure the signatures are from the proper district and party, with the name and address properly filled in.
- If you have fewer than 10% above the number of signatures required for the office you seek, you may consider requesting a review by local local election officials of signatures not certified.
- Pick up the certified papers from the local election officials and don't miss the deadline for filing with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.
- Be sure to file at least one paper with your certificate of enrollment or certificate of voter registration signed by at least three of your local election officials.
- Be sure to file the receipt from the State Ethics Commission (except candidates for federal office).
Statewide candidates must file a receipt from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance.
- After the papers are filed you may wish to check the papers of other candidates to see if there is any reason for challenge.