

Running for Office/Primary Election

DECIDING TO RUN FOR OFFICE

A prospective candidate for public office should determine if he or she can afford the commitment of time, money and energy necessary to run for public office. A prospective candidate must also make sure that he or she is qualified to hold the office being sought.

TWO METHODS FOR GAINING ACCESS TO THE BALLOT

There are two methods by which a candidate may gain access to the November ballot: 1) gaining access to a political party's primary ballot and winning that party's nomination by means of **nomination petitions**; and 2) gaining direct access to the November ballot by means of **nomination papers**, which are filed by minor political parties and political bodies.

In order to have your name placed on the ballot, a prospective candidate should be familiar with the instructions on the nomination and state ethics forms. In addition, each candidate should also be aware of the rules and regulations spelled out in the Campaign Finance Reporting Law. Detailed booklets about these matters can be obtained at the Voter Services Office.

CIRCULATING A PETITION

Potential candidates who wish to have their name placed on the ballot in a Primary Election should pick up nomination petition forms at the Voter Services Office, 330 Pine Street, 1st Floor, Williamsport, PA. First contact Voter Services at 327-2267 to see if petitions are available for pick up. Petition forms can only be circulated within a specific time frame and the directions on these forms should be followed very carefully. There is also a deadline when the petitions must be filed in the Voter Services Office.

Nomination petitions must be circulated and filed between the 13th Tuesday and the 10th Tuesday preceding the Primary.

Nomination papers must be circulated and filed between the 10th Wednesday preceding the primary and August 1st of each year.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Candidates are responsible for keeping careful records of all contributions received and any expenditures made in support of their run for office. Any financial activities directed toward influencing an election must be reported. This not only includes the candidate, but committees and private individuals as well.

OPENING A COMMITTEE

Often a candidate will authorize a committee to accept contributions and make expenditures on his or her behalf. This committee must have a chair and a treasurer. Forms for opening a committee are available at the Voter Services office or can be obtained from this website.

REPORTING CONTRIBUTIONS AND EXPENDITURES

A campaign finance reporting schedule is mandated by law and due dates are specified as follows:

- Sixth Tuesday Pre-Primary/Election (Statewide Offices only)
- Second Friday Pre-Primary/Election
- Thirty Day Post Primary/Election

A detailed list of reporting dates is available at the Voter Services Office.

If receipts and/or expenditures during a specific reporting period exceed \$250, a report of these must be filed. If the amount is less than \$250, a statement is filed in lieu of a report. Again, the report forms and statement forms are available in the Voter Services office.

ELECTIONEERING

No person, including a candidate, may electioneer or solicit votes when inside a polling place. All person, except those persons authorized to be inside the polling place (election officers, clerks, machine inspectors, overseers, watchers, persons in the course of voting, persons lawfully giving assistance to voters, and constables, must remain at least ten (10) feet from the polling place during the time the polls are open.

WATCHERS

Each candidate may appoint two watchers for each polling place in which the candidate's name appears on the ballot. However, only one watcher for each candidate may be present in the polling place at any one time.

Candidates interested in appointing watchers should contact the Voter Services Office for information about submitting the names, addresses and precinct assignment of watchers and obtaining certification for those watchers. Instructions for the watchers are on the reversed side of the watcher certificate.

UNOFFICIAL ELECTION NIGHT RETURNS

Unofficial election returns from the polling places in Lycoming County will be available on the County's web page at www.lyco.org.

COMPUTATION AND CANVASS OF ELECTION RETURNS

The County Board of Elections begins the official computation and canvass of election returns at 9:00 am on the third day following the election. Each candidate is entitled to be present in person or by attorney in fact at any proceeding before the county board of elections.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. ***What is a Statement of Financial Interests?***
This two-part, carbonized statement, is also known as the ethics form and is the required method for the candidate to provide information about sources of income. The yellow copy must accompany the nomination petition when it is filed in the Voter Services Office. The original (white copy) must be filed with the municipal or school district office, depending on what office you are seeking. Instructions for the Statement of Financial Interests form are found on the reverse side of the form.
2. ***How many signatures must a candidate get on a nomination petition?***
The number of required signatures varies depending on the office you are seeking. Please contact Voter Services Office for this information at 570-327-2267.
3. ***Are there fees required when a Primary Election petition is filed?***
Again, the fee requirement varies depending on the office you are seeking. Please contact Voter Services Office for this information at 570-327-2267.
4. ***Why would a petition be rejected by the Voter Services Office?***
 - The wrong petition form was used; any petition form prior to 2007 is obsolete.
 - There were not enough signatures.
 - The petition was filed prior to the mandated start date.
 - The petition was received by the Voter Services Office after the deadline.
 - The petition is not properly notarized.
 - Any required part of the petition form is not filled in.
 - The yellow ethics form (Statement of Financial Interests) does not accompany the petition.
 - Any required fee is not submitted.
5. ***When can nomination petitions be challenged?***
A petition must be challenged within 7 days of the filing deadline.

6. ***What are the reasons that petitions are challenged?***

Petitions can be challenged in Court

- The signer is not an enrolled voter in the petitioner's party.
- The signer does not reside in the district where the petitioner is seeking office.
- The white ethics form is not filed with the governing body of the office sought by the petitioner.
- The dates on the signature lines are out of order.

7. ***How does a candidate find out if he or she is on the ballot?***

Contact the Voter Services Office after the challenge deadline at 570-327-2267.

8. ***How is ballot position determined in a Primary Election?***

A "Casting of Lots" is conducted approximately a week after the petition filing deadline. The time and place is published in the Sun Gazette and a letter is sent to the candidates.

9. ***Do the winners in the Primary Election automatically appear on the November ballot?***

Yes, unless the candidate withdraws.

10. ***What if someone who is not a member of a major political party (Democratic or Republican) would like to run for office? How does this candidate seek a position on the ballot in a General (November) Election?***

Candidates of minor political parties or political bodies can file nomination papers after the deadline for accepting petitions. The time frame for filing nomination papers is normally extended into August because these candidates are seeking access to the General November Ballot, rather than the Primary Ballot.

11. ***How many signatures must a minor political party or political body candidate get on a nomination paper?***

Nomination papers contain signatures from qualified electors of the district where the candidate from the political party or political body is running. The required amount of signatures is at least 2% of the largest vote cast for a candidate elected within the same district (as the office the minor political party or political body candidate seeks) in the last Municipal Election.

The Voter Services Office will assist any candidate in determining the required number of signatures.

12. ***What is required to open a campaign committee?***

- Political Committee Registration Statement
- Authorization form signed by the candidate
- Chairperson
- Treasurer

13. *Must a committee always have a chairperson and treasurer?*

Yes. No contributions can be received or expenditures made unless both positions are filled.

14. *What is the definition of a contribution?*

A contribution is any gift, loan or payment to a candidate or committee for the purpose of influencing an election, including paying debts incurred by the candidate or committee.

15. *Where does a candidate and a committee file campaign expense reports?*

- Candidates for a statewide office, state legislative offices or Court of Common Pleas must file their original reports with the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and then file with the Election board of the county where they reside.
- Local candidates file their reports with their county's Election Board office – Voter Services Office, 330 Pine Street, Suite 101

16. *What is the mailing address for Voter Services Office?*

All mail for the Voter Services office must be sent to 48 West Third Street, Williamsport, PA 17701.