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2009 Professional Practices Program

Voter List Flow Chart

City of Woburn, Massachusetts

Submitted by:

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The Issue:

The Massachusetts Legislature enacted a statute effective October 29, 2008 that allowed voters to return to their former community of residence to vote for up to eighteen (18) months after they moved if they had failed to register to vote in their new community of residence. [See Massachusetts Great and General Court Chapter 369 of the Acts of 2008] This extended the grace period from six (6) months to eighteen (18) months which had been the prevailing standard.

Further complicating the matter was that voters who returned up to six (6) months to their community of residence voted using the same white ballot (“full ballot”) as all other voters in that precinct. Voters who returned between six (6) months and eighteen (18) months to their community of residence voted using a specially printed orange partial ballot (“partial ballot”) limited to the Presidential and U.S. Senate races. In addition, voters had to execute one of two rosters depending upon whether they voted using the full ballot or the partial ballot.

In Massachusetts, elections are conducted at the municipal level. City clerks, town clerks and election commissioners are responsible for hiring and training the wardens, clerks and inspectors who work at the polls on election day. The clerks and commissioners were not aware of the special legislation until its passage was announced on October 29, 2008 – the Wednesday just six days before election day. The vast majority of poll workers across the State had already attended their training for the election to be held on November 4, 2008 – an election by all accounts expected to have an historically large voter turnout.

The office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth attempted to convey operational procedures to the clerks and commissioners in a four page memorandum with accompanying rosters for full ballot voters and partial ballot voters. The challenge for clerks and commissioners was condensing the information from the four page memorandum into a format that was understandable to the wardens, clerks and inspectors working at the polls, distributing the information to the poll workers, and placing the information in a useable format for the poll workers on election day.

The Solution:

Borrowing from a study method used in law school, I have produced flow charts in the past to help poll workers navigate in a simple manner the myriad election procedures on election day. The situation seemed an ideal moment to produce a flow chart for the election workers.

The flow chart was printed on an 11 inch by 17 inch paper and printed on two sides. The front side contained scenarios that the poll workers may encounter for a particular voter on election day. Selecting the correct scenario, the poll workers followed the step-by-step procedure required to process the voter. Additional instructions were printed on the back of the form describing special provisional ballot procedures in place for this election.

The flow charts were mailed to wardens and clerks on October 31, 2008 with an explanatory cover letter. Clearly marked packages including the flow chart, the six month roster, the six to eighteen month roster and the partial orange ballots were included at the top of the supply boxes sent to the polls on election day morning. Multiple copies of the flow chart were included for use at the check-in tables by the poll workers.

I communicated with the wardens, who are the presiding officers of the precincts, by telephone leading up to election day and visited each precinct early on election day to answer questions concerning implementation of the new, temporary rule. The wardens reported that the flow chart eased the ability of their inspectors – the front line workers – to process voters falling within the parameters of the rule.

The clerks and commissioners in Massachusetts have a collegial relationship and share information concerning best practices at conferences and in meetings whenever there is a potential benefit to the larger election community. In view of the short period of time, I transmitted the flow chart using the email lists of the Massachusetts City Clerks Association and Massachusetts Town Clerks Association. This allowed other communities the advantage of printing and using the flow chart in their community or using it as a supplement to their own work in executing the requirements of the statute. The only monetary cost to the communities was for the paper to print the flow chart.

Respectfully submitted,

*William C. Campbell, City Clerk
Woburn, Massachusetts*

If voter moved out of Woburn before May 4, 2007 or out of State, she cannot vote in Woburn except with provisional ballot.

Voter on list

Inactive voter → → → lives in Woburn → → → →
1. Complete Affidavit of current and continuous residence
2. Verify ID address matches address on voter list
3. Votes in machine on regular white ballot

Inactive voter moved from Woburn after May 4, 2008 → → 1. Voter completes "6 Month Roster"
2. Verify ID by address does not have to match Woburn address
3. Votes in machine on regular white ballot

Inactive voter moved from Woburn between May 4, 2007 and May 3, 2008 → → 1. Voter completes "Partial Ballot Roster"
2. Verify ID but address does not have to match Woburn address
3. Votes in machine on partial orange ballot

Voter not on list → check with City Clerk

Claims right to vote AND lives in Woburn → → Voter votes with regular white ballot following regular Provisional Ballot procedure (see Voter List Issues Flow Chart)

Claims right to vote and can verify voter moved from Woburn after May 4, 2008 → → 1. Voter completes "6 Month Roster"
2. Verify ID but address does not have to match Woburn address
3. Votes in machine on regular white ballot

Claims right to vote and can verify voter moved from Woburn between May 4, 2007 and May 3, 2008 → → 1. Voter completes "Partial Ballot Roster"
2. Verify ID but address does not have to match Woburn address
3. Votes in machine on partial orange ballot

Claims right to vote and moved from Woburn between May 4, 2007 and May 3, 2008 but cannot be confirmed → → See reverse for special Provisional Ballot procedure

Claims right to vote and moved from Woburn after May 4, 2008 but cannot be confirmed → → See reverse for Special Provisional Ballot procedure

Special Provisional Ballot Procedures for voters who are not on list

Claims right to vote and moved from Woburn between May 4, 2007 and May 3, 2008 but cannot be confirmed → → Voter votes with Provisional Ballot procedure below

1. Voter completes the "Partial Ballot Roster".
2. Poll worker gives ballot a number starting with PA, ex. PA1, PA2, PA3, etc.
3. Poll worker writes the Provisional Ballot Number in the last column of the "Partial Ballot Roster".
4. Poll worker writes the word "Provisional" in the top box of the partial orange ballot.
5. Poll worker writes ward and precinct and Provisional Ballot Number on a Provisional Ballot Envelope and Provisional Ballot Information Sheet.
6. Hand the voter the ballot, Provisional Ballot Envelope and Provisional Ballot Information Sheet.
7. Voter goes to marking booth, votes, seals ballot in envelope and returns ballot in envelope to Warden or Clerk.
8. Poll worker places Provisional Ballot in envelope in the green Provisional Ballot envelope.

Claims right to vote and moved from Woburn after May 4, 2008 but cannot be confirmed → → Voter votes with Provisional Ballot procedure below

1. Voter completes the "6 Month Roster".
2. Poll worker gives ballot a number starting with PA, ex. PA1, PA2, PA3, etc.
3. Poll worker writes the Provisional Ballot Number in the last column of the "6 Month Roster".
4. Poll worker writes the word "Provisional" in the top box of the regular white ballot.
5. Poll worker writes ward and precinct and Provisional Ballot Number on a Provisional Ballot Envelope and Provisional Ballot Information Sheet.
6. Hand the voter the ballot, Provisional Ballot Envelope and Provisional Ballot Information Sheet.
7. Voter goes to marking booth, votes, seals ballot in envelope and returns ballot in envelope to Warden or Clerk.
8. Poll worker places Provisional Ballot in envelope in the green Provisional Ballot envelope.

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ALL OPTIONS