



★ VIRGINIA ★
DEPARTMENT *of* ELECTIONS

the Handbook

Chapter II

Election Day Manual

September 2026

11.1 CHAPTER ORGANIZATION	3
11.2 GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION DAY	4
11.2.1. GENERAL DISRUPTION AND CAMPAIGNING WITHIN THE POLLING PLACE.....	4
11.2.2. ELECTION OFFENSES	4
11.2.3. AUTHORIZED INDIVIDUALS AT POLLING LOCATIONS	5
11.2.4. FEDERAL CIVIL IMMIGRATION ARRESTS	5
11.2.5. CURBSIDE VOTERS.....	6
11.2.6. WEAPONS IN THE POLLING PLACE	6
11.2.7. SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY EXCEPTION	7
11.2.8. ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE POLLING PLACE (1VAC20-60-30)	7
11.2.9 REPRESENTATIVES AND OBSERVERS.....	7
11.2.10 AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES	8
11.2.11 MUST BE AUTHORIZED IN WRITING	8
11.2.12 GRANT EQUAL ACCESS.....	8
11.2.13 CHILDREN IN THE POLLING PLACE	8
11.3. IN CASE OF EMERGENCY	9
11.3.1. PREPAREDNESS AND IMMEDIATE RESPONSE	9
11.3.2. RESUME VOTING AFTER EVACUATION: HOW, WHEN AND WHERE.....	10
11.3.3. IF THE POLLING PLACE DOES NOT HAVE OPERATIONAL VOTING EQUIPMENT OR SUFFICIENT BALLOTS	10
11.3.4. IF YOU CANNOT RESTART VOTING OUTSIDE THE POLLING PLACE	10
11.3.4.1. EMERGENCY POLLING PLACE RELOCATION ON ELECTION DAY	10
11.3.5. COMMON ELECTION DAY EMERGENCIES.....	11
11.4. OTHER DIFFICULTIES ON ELECTION DAY	13
11.5. ELECTION DAY COMPLAINTS	15
11.5.1. ELECTION DAY COMPLAINTS	15
11.5.2. INFORMAL COMPLAINTS.....	15
11.5.3. HAVA COMPLAINTS	16
11.6. ELECTION DAY OFFENSES.....	17
11.6.1. COMMON ELECTION DAY OFFENSES.....	17
11.6.2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE RELATED OFFENSES: REPORTING AND ADVERTISING.....	17
11.6.3. VIOLATIONS OF FEDERAL LAW	18
11.6.4. SEVERE OFFENSES	18
APPENDIX A: EMERGENCY REPRODUCTION OF BALLOTS.....	19
APPENDIX B: COURT EXTENDS POLLING HOURS	20



ELECTION DAY MANUAL

REQUIRED FORMS	ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	REFERENCE	REGULATIONS
Management Incident Report HAVA Administrative Complaint Procedure Emergency Polling Place Change (System Support JIRA ticket)	Voter Complaint Form SBE-15512. List of Institutions of Higher Education Officer of Election Election Day Oath (SBE-611.1) Election Page Oath (SBE-604(H)) Oath or Affirmation for Officers of Election SBE-120	ELECT-601 Prohibited Areas and Activities Poster ELECT-604 Dos and Don'ts for Campaigners and Authorized Representatives ELECT-604G Guidelines for Campaigners and Authorized Representatives What Ifs ELECT-103 CAP Election Day Guide ELECT-103 EDG Election Day Guide	1 VAC 20-60-30 Electronic Devices in Polling Places 1 VAC 20-60-40 When Ballot Cast 1 VAC 20-60-50 Overfull Optical Scan Ballot Container 1 VAC 20-60-60 Provisional Votes 1 VAC 20-20-80 Complaints

11.1 CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

This chapter should be a resource for general registrars, local electoral board members, and officers of election. §11.2 addresses common questions and situations that can arise on election days such as general disruptions, campaigning near or in the polling place, voters or elections officials bringing weapons into polling places, electronic devices, authorized representatives, and children in the polling place. This section also addresses the exception in the Code of Virginia permitting a voter on the sex offender registry to go to a public school if that is the voter's lawful polling place.

Read §11.3 before election day so you are familiar with emergency procedures. However, you can also use §11.3 as a quick resource guide. §11.3 can be used in each polling place by the chief officers of election who are responsible for reacting to emergencies, providing notice, and following emergency protocols. §11.3.1 specifically discusses preparedness planning; §11.3.2 provides guidance for where, when, and how to resume voting if the circumstances require a polling place to be evacuated. Use §11.3.4 as a resource for emergencies that may arise immediately such as the inability to enter a polling place due to high water or locked doors. Refer to §11.3.5 for all other emergency responses.

§11.5 discusses Election Day complaints (both informal complaints and Help America Vote Act complaints). §11.6 covers common Election Day offenses and how to respond appropriately.



11.2 GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION DAY

11.2.1. General Disruption and Campaigning Within the Polling Place

If a voter or any other person is disrupting the polls, or any person is campaigning within the prohibited area or polling place, there are certain steps that can be taken to contain the situation.

First, election officials (preferably two officials) should ask the person to cease the disruption or ask the person who is campaigning to leave the prohibited area and polling place. If the person is entering or inside the polling place to vote, make sure the voter is aware of the prohibition on campaigning in this area. If the person continues to campaign or becomes disruptive, officers of election should call 9-1-1. (Note: If you call 9-1-1, be sure to identify yourself as the chief election officer or an election official.) Remember to **complete an Incident Report** (form can be found in [FormsWarehouse under Election Management](#)).

Please keep in mind the restrictions applicable to any person in the polling place, outlined in the Code of Virginia §§ 24.2-604 and 24.2-607 and in the Prohibited Areas and Activities posters that are required to be hung at all early voting and Election Day polling locations. Restrictions include:¹

- **No person** in the polling place may “(i) **hinder or delay** a qualified voter; (2) give, tender, or exhibit any ballot, ticket, or campaign or referendum materials to any person; (iii) solicit or in any manner **try to influence any person in casting his ballot**; (iv) hinder or delay any officer of election (v) be in a position to **see the marked ballot of any voter**; or (vi) **otherwise impede** the orderly conduct of the election.” Code § 24.2-604(D).
- **Do not allow observers to provide any assistance to any voter.** Make sure observers are not wearing any indication they are authorized to help voters. Code §24.2-604(C).
- **No person can intimidate or interfere** with any qualified voter to prevent the voter from casting a secret ballot. Code § 24.2-607.

These prohibited activities shall not be construed to prevent a person approaching or entering the polling place for the purpose of voting from wearing a shirt, hat, or other apparel (including a sticker or button) with a candidate’s name or slogan on it.²

11.2.2. Election Offenses

11.2.2.1. Threats and Intimidation

The Virginia Code protects both voters and election officials from threats and intimidation. Under Va. Code § [24.2-606](#), officers of election, with the consent of the chief law enforcement official for their locality, may designate a law enforcement officer who shall preserve order inside and outside the polling place. Additionally, officers of election should feel empowered to remind anyone intimidating a voter that each instance of such behavior is a Class 1 misdemeanor.

¹ See [§§ 24.2-604](#) and [24.2-607](#).

² See [§24.2-604](#).



Further, threats and acts of intimidation toward election officials, including officers of election, are a Class 5 felony.

11.2.2.2. Electoral Board Member ID Badges

While conducting their official duties on Election Day, electoral board members *must* wear the standardized identification badge provided to them by the Department of Elections.³ Alternative ID badges are not compliant with this requirement. If an electoral board member knowingly violates this section, they may receive a civil penalty not to exceed \$250.

11.2.3. Authorized Individuals at Polling Locations

In addition to voters who are actively voting, officers of election, general registrars, staff members, and electoral board members, there are individuals who may be present at polling locations for observation purposes (some have the right under law, others require permission). All observers must comply with the relevant law allowing them to be in the polling location and must not interfere with voting or the operations of the polling location.

- **Authorized representatives of parties and candidates:**
Under Va. Code § 24.2-604, representatives of political parties and candidates have the right to observe and must be able to see and hear.
- **Neutral observers:** Va. Code § 24.2-604.5 allows the electoral board or general registrar to authorize, in writing, neutral observers:
- **Media:** Va. Code § 24.2-605 allows news media to visit and film or photograph inside the polling place for a reasonable and limited period of time while polls are open. However, they are not allowed to hinder or delay voters or officers of election and must not photograph or film how an individual voter has voted.
- **Federal observers:** For federal elections, the Voting Rights Act Section 3(a) (52 U.S.C. 10305) authorizes observers pursuant to a court order. Also, the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division uses monitoring personnel to assess compliance with federal voting rights laws, as authorized by the U.S. Attorney General. Further, the Help America Vote Act (52 U.S.C. 21083) allows Congress to designate, in writing, election observers to observe polling locations and any other aspect of the electoral process for federal elections. DOJ and Congressional Observers are not allowed to intimidate voters or disrupt the electoral process. Please contact your liaison with any questions regarding federal observers.

11.2.4. Federal Civil Immigration Arrests

Executive Order 16 (2026) A Safer Virginia for All reaffirms the Commonwealth of Virginia's commitment to constitutional, professional policing, and ensures that Virginians holding public

³ Va. Code § [24.602.1](#).



positions most likely to interact with federal immigration enforcement have the appropriate guidance.⁴

General registrars and officers of election should note that the prohibited activities discussed in this advisory also apply to federal civil immigration officials. For example, no federal civil immigration officer is entitled to violate the prohibitions of the 40-foot protected area established under Va. Code § 24.2-604. These individuals are also subject to the requirements of 24.2-606 Preservation of order at elections.

In the event of a federal civil law enforcement arrest or attempted arrest at a polling location, please contact local law enforcement. The general registrar and local electoral board should be notified ASAP about any attempted civil federal immigration arrests at a polling place. The general registrar should also notify the ELECT liaison on call as soon as practicable.

11.2.5. Curbside Voters

While the creation of a 40-foot protected area is not provided by the Virginia Code in relation to a person voting curbside, there is nonetheless the ability (and duty) to ensure curbside voters are able to cast their ballots in a manner free of intimidation and influence. The Code provides numerous protections for voters, including by creating a criminal penalty for intimidation, threats, or coercion under Va. Code § 24.2-1005. Further, Va. Code § 24.2-607 prohibits hindering, intimidating, or interfering with a voter to prevent them from casting a secret ballot and allows an officer of election to order a person to cease such conduct. In conducting an orderly election consistent with the Code of Virginia, officers of election have a duty to protect voters from such violations, including curbside voters.

11.2.6. Weapons in the Polling Place

Virginia law prohibits bringing firearms and other weapons within 100 feet of any building or any part thereof that is being used as a polling place unless otherwise authorized by law such as:⁵

- Any law-enforcement officer or any retired law-enforcement officer qualified pursuant to Code of Virginia § 18.2-308.016(C);
- Any person occupying his own private property that falls within 100 feet of a polling place; or
- An armed security officer, licensed pursuant to Article 4 (§ 9.1-138 et seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1 of the Code of Virginia, whose employment or performance of his duties occurs within 100 feet of any building, or part thereof, used as a polling place.



Officers of election have the authority to preserve order in the polling place. If a person in possession of a weapon or firearm is acting in violation of Virginia law, the officers of election

⁴ Office of the Governor of Virginia. (2026). “A Safer Virginia for All” ([Executive Order No. 15](#)).

⁵ *Id.*



may first order the person to stop and leave the prohibited area. If the person does not stop, the officers of election, by a majority vote, may order the arrest of the individual by a law enforcement officer.⁶ **In no circumstance should an officer of election or other elections official possess any weapon while in the polling place.**

11.2.7. Sex Offender Registry Exception

A voter listed on the sex offender registry normally cannot go near or inside a public school. However, the Code of Virginia § 18.2-370.5 provides an **explicit exemption for voters** whose polling location is located inside a school: these provisions “shall not apply to such adult if he is a lawfully registered and qualified voter and is coming upon such property solely for purposes of casting his vote”.⁷

11.2.8. Electronic Devices in the Polling Place (IVAC20-60-30)

The use of electronic devices in the polling place is generally accepted. However, representatives of candidates and political parties authorized to observe the election are prohibited from taking photos or video within the polling place.⁸

Officers of election may restrict the use of electronic devices *if* such use hinders, delays, or disrupts the voting process. The decision to restrict the use of electronic devices must be agreed to by a majority of the officers of election at that polling place.⁹ This decision is immediately appealable to the local electoral board. While an individual may be asked to leave the polling place for being disruptive, no voter may be removed from the polling place for the disruptive use of an electronic device until after the voter has cast their ballot.

No electoral board may enact a policy that completely disallows the use of electronic devices by all individuals.¹⁰

11.2.9 Representatives and Observers

Questions regarding authorized representatives and neutral observers are addressed in the Code of Virginia §24.2-604(C), 24.2-604.4, and 24.2-604.5¹¹ and in the ELECT-604 Dos and Don'ts for Campaigners and Authorized Representatives (found in [FormsWarehouse under Election Management](#)). No person in the polling place may hinder or delay a qualified voter, give, tender, or in any manner try to influence a voter, be in a position to see the marked ballot of any voter, or otherwise impede the orderly conduct of the election.

Do not allow observers to provide any assistance to any voter. Make sure observers are not wearing any indication that they are authorized to help voters.

⁶ See [§24.2-607\(A\)](#).

⁷ See [§18.2-370.5](#).

⁸ See Virginia Admin. Code [IVAC20-60-30](#).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.* See 2016 Op. Va. Att'y. Gen. 16 ([Sept. 29, 2016](#)).

¹¹ See [§§ 24.2-604\(C\), 24.2-604.4, and 24.2-604.5](#).



11.2.10 Authorized Representatives

Officers of election shall admit authorized representatives for the Democratic and Republican parties and independent candidates to the polling place as long as the total number of representatives complies with the Code of Virginia § 24.2-604.4; this statute limits the number of representatives for each political party or candidate to the greater of one authorized representative per pollbook, or three representatives of any political party or independent candidate.¹²

Each authorized representative must be a qualified voter in the Commonwealth (of any jurisdiction).¹³ Each authorized representative must present a written statement authorized and signed by the party chair or independent candidate. Photocopies of the written statement are acceptable.

11.2.11 Must Be Authorized in Writing

The local electoral board or general registrar may authorize *in writing* the presence of additional neutral observers as may be deemed appropriate.¹⁴ Local electoral boards and registrars should consider adopting a consistent policy for responding to such requests and objective criteria for deciding. This will help ensure fair treatment of requestors.

11.2.12 Grant Equal Access

If a local EB or GR grants authorization to neutral observers in addition to the authorized representatives, please keep in mind the optics of granting permission to one group without also providing notice and the opportunity to other similar or opposing groups that may wish to be present. Other factors that may be considered by the electoral board or general registrar are the number of expected voters, the amount of equipment allocated, and the number of officers scheduled to be in each precinct.

While a general policy denying requests from any group not required to have access to polling places is allowable, you should consider if other options would assist in making the election process more transparent. These options include limiting neutral observers to the less busy times of day and/or offering to allow access during a non-presidential election.

11.2.13 Children in the Polling Place

As a rule, a voter may be accompanied into the voting booth by children aged fifteen or younger.¹⁵ Under laws that prohibit disruption of voting, the officers may ask a parent whose child becomes unruly to get them under control. **In no case should an officer of election or electoral board member ever touch or discipline the child.** It is the parent's responsibility to control the child he or she has brought into the polling place. If the child feeds the ballot into the tabulator or otherwise casts the ballot and the voter has not completed the ballot, a new ballot will **not be provided**. If a ballot is damaged, the voter

¹² See [§24.2-604.4](#).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ See [§24.2-643\(A\)](#).



may “void” it and a new ballot can be issued. However, children should not be allowed to mark or play with a ballot. While Code language allowing a child to accompany the voter is written in the singular, there is not a one child per voter limit.

The officer should normally assume that the child accompanying the voter is “his [or her] child.” No affirmation of kinship is required. Only the most obvious abuse should be questioned. For example, a teacher trying to claim a class of twenty as “his children” obviously does not fall within the intended meaning of the law. The class would fall under the definition of “neutral observers”, which can only be authorized in writing in advance by the electoral board.¹⁶

11.3. IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

The Code of Virginia states that polls **MUST** be open for voters to place their vote at 6:00 a.m.¹⁷ Officers of election **MUST** be present by 5:15 a.m.¹⁸ Officers other than the chief and assistant chief may be assigned to work less than a full election day.¹⁹

11.3.1. Preparedness and Immediate Response

Each Chief Officer of Election should be instructed to divide the below in-case-of-emergency tasks amongst the officers of election *before voting commences at 6 am on Election Day*. If this has not been done, the Chief Officer of Election should assign these tasks prior to announcing the emergency to the public.

Prepare by assigning one of the below mandatory tasks to each officer of election *in advance of the emergency*.

1. Take a headcount of all people in the polling location.
2. Call the general registrar and/or electoral board.
3. Alert all present individuals of the emergency circumstances as calmly as appropriate and remind them of the predetermined assembly area. All present people should assemble at a predetermined assembly point at least 300 feet away from the building (or as close to 300 feet as terrain/conditions will allow) and outside of parking areas, if possible.
4. Take quick note of the “Public Counter” number on the machine(s).
5. List the names of those who checked in before the evacuation but were unable to vote.
6. If the emergency permits, all officers of election should be prepared to take the following items out of the compromised polling place:
 - a. Counter
 - b. Ballot container(s)

¹⁶ See [§24.2-604](#).

¹⁷ See [§24.2-603](#).

¹⁸ See [§24.2-639](#).

¹⁹ See [§24.2-115.1](#).



- c. Pollbook(s)
- d. Unused ballots
- e. Necessary forms and materials to allow voting to continue
 - i. Affirmation of Eligibility
 - ii. Provisional voting materials
 - iii. Precinct lists
- f. Vital Supplies (cell phone, tape, etc.)

11.3.2. Resume Voting After Evacuation: How, When and Where

General registrars and officers of election should seek to ensure that voting can be recommenced (outside the polling place) as soon as it is both possible and safe.

11.3.3. If the polling place does not have operational voting equipment or sufficient ballots

Use emergency paper ballots as per Code of Virginia § 24.2-642.²⁰ If electronic pollbooks are used and unavailable, provisional ballots should be issued to all voters.

11.3.4. If you cannot restart voting outside the polling place

Contact your local Electoral Board to request authorization for an alternative polling location. The local Electoral Board may authorize moving the polling to another location but must do so with the Department of Elections' approval. If the relocation is authorized, an election official must leave directions to the new location posted on the doors of the original polling place (post on both the main entrance and other accessible entryways, if applicable). If the election official is unable to safely move near the building to place the poster, consider placing a sign or poster along the typical route voters would take to approach the building. It is recommended that local election officials provide public notice of the emergency change as soon as possible in addition to alerting local parties and campaigns regarding the emergency change.

The directions should indicate the time this polling place was vacated and, on whose authority, e.g., "Vacated by authority of the Electoral Board, 2 p.m. To vote, please report to _____." As a best practice, consider adding a number for voters to call with any questions.

11.3.4.1. Emergency Polling Place Relocation on Election Day

After receiving notice of an emergency at a polling place, the general registrar or electoral board should:

- Contact local law enforcement and local emergency management.

²⁰ See [§ 24.2-642](#).



- Contact the Department of Elections via your assigned ERS Liaison to propose an alternative location. An alternate location must be established within the precinct or within 1 mile outside the precinct boundary. The safest, most efficient shelter should be used to resume voting as soon as possible after the new location has been approved.
- Complete the Emergency Polling Place Change System Support JIRA ticket.
- Voters must be notified of the new polling location by the most efficient means, such as fliers and the news media (television and radio, if possible).
- Candidates on the ballot (or their campaigns) must also be notified of the new polling location.

The chief officer of election should:

- Plan to transport the necessary equipment & supplies to the new location.²¹
- Advise voters at the polling location who had not yet voted of the new polling location.
- Post notices at and outside the old (original) polling place.

11.3.5. Common Election Day Emergencies

11.3.5.1 Cannot Enter the Polling Location

In the case of **high water** before or after the polls open:

- First notify the registrar, who will in turn contact the local electoral board.
- The electoral board must follow the guidelines established in your Election Emergency Procedures.
- After the alternate plans have been finalized, the electoral board and chief election official will notify election officials on how to proceed.

In the case of **locked doors**:

- If the Chief Officer of Election does not have the key for the polls, they should ensure, prior to Election Day, that they have phone numbers for contacting a facility custodian or the management staff.
- If the Chief Officer of Election cannot contact facility staff, they should contact the registrar and begin following the guidelines for an alternate polling location.

11.3.5.2. Emergencies Involving Election Officials and Supplies

If the **chief election official does not arrive with the supplies by 5:15 a.m.:**

- Any election official present should notify the general registrar.
- The office staff will attempt to reach the chief at their home.

²¹ See [§24.2-638](#).



- If the chief cannot immediately get to the polls with the supplies and books, the electoral board will deliver supplies, ballots, and a machine key immediately to the polling place.
- Until the pollbooks (which are in the custody of the chief) arrive, the registrar's office must be called to verify that each voter is qualified. For each qualified voter who votes on the registrar's authorization before the pollbooks arrive, record the voter's full name, street address, and pollbook count (PBC) number on a notepad.
- Once the officers have the pollbooks, they record the voters and PBC numbers in the appropriate sections (double-checking names and addresses to make sure the correct voter is marked).
- If there is no phone service, or the registrar is not available, follow the normal procedures for a voter who is not listed on the pollbook, using a paper ballot, and completing the Provisional Ballot envelope. Do not mark these voters on the notepad or pollbook.

If a voter must leave before you receive ballots, take their name and phone number. If the voter returns later in the day, place them at the front of the line, if one exists. However, a voter who has already been checked in on the pollbook as present to vote and then leaves may not return and vote later.

If the chief election official is ill or has a family emergency before the election

- The assistant chief or other designated official will be notified to pick up the supplies and ballots.
- That individual will serve as chief in the absence of the originally designated chief.

If the supplies are destroyed, immediately call the registrar so that new supplies may be furnished.

- The supplies and ballots must not be left overnight in an automobile. The chief should ensure the supplies, equipment, and ballots are safely secured both at home and at the polling location when they check their equipment. If the supplies are destroyed, the registrar's staff will then replace supplies.

In the event that the **precinct is short of election officials**,

- The shortage must be reported as the chief or assistant chief becomes aware.
- The registrar's office will attempt to replace the official.
- The other election officials must proceed in opening the polls.
- If an officer of election is absent or unable to serve and the polls have been open for one hour, the remaining officers of election shall appoint a substitute officer of election for the precinct. The substitute officer shall possess the same qualifications and, after taking the requisite oath, have the same powers as officers appointed by an electoral board.²²

²² See [§ 24.2-118](#).



11.4. OTHER DIFFICULTIES ON ELECTION DAY

In the event that voting equipment **malfunctions or is damaged**:

- Immediately report the malfunction to the voting machine technicians or the registrar/electoral board's office.
- Follow procedures in the Code of Virginia under "Inoperative Equipment."²³
- When using optical scan ballots, voting will continue normally except for the tabulating.
 - Any voted ballots must be placed in the emergency ballot container. The ballots will remain in that container until the polls close and then the ballots will be fed through the counter.
 - If the officials neglect to place the ballots in the emergency ballot container before running the tapes, the technicians and an electoral board member must be summoned to the precinct and observe while all the ballots are run through the counter again before the results can be reported.
 - The ballots may have to be read or hand-counted if the locality does not have the equipment. However, note that under Virginia Code 24.2-654, "In ascertaining the vote, the officers of election shall use ballot scanner machines to count machine-readable ballots. **The officers shall not count machine-readable ballots by hand unless** (i) the ballot scanner machine is inoperative, (ii) there is no other available scanner, and (iii) it would be unreasonable to wait for (a) the inoperative ballot scanner to be made operative or (b) an operative ballot scanner machine to be delivered to the polling place rather than hand counting the ballots."

In the event that the **ballot container is damaged or missing**:

- Immediately report this to the registrar and a technician will be sent to repair or replace the container.
- If the emergency ballot slot cannot be used, the voters must place their ballots in the black supply container, or other container that is sealed and has a slot on top.
- The ballots must remain in that container until the polls close and then the ballots must be fed through the tabulator.

In the event that a **voter willfully damages a ballot**:

- Place the damaged ballot with the spoiled ballots and reissue the ballot.
- Explain the suspected reason why the ballot was rejected by the voting system (crumpled, folded, etc.) and remind them not to damage the ballot.
- If the voter intentionally renders the ballot unreadable a second time in violation of the officer's instructions, the officer of election shall reissue the ballot and tell the voter that further intentional damage will result in contacting law enforcement.

²³ See [§ 24.2-642](#).



- If the voter intentionally renders their ballot unreadable a third time, officers of election should inform the general registrar and call law enforcement.²⁴

In the event that the **precinct phone is not working**:

- Report the problem to the facility's custodial or the management staff.
- Another phone may be obtained to report the nonfunctional phone or down service to the registrar.
- If needed, a wireless phone may be provided until phone service is restored.

In the event that the **registrar's phones are not working**:

- Use wireless phones until service is restored.
- Notify all precincts of the new temporary number at which the registrar's staff may be reached.

In the event of **power failure at the registrar's office**:

- Decide if the staff will be relocated.
- Notify election officials of the new location and contact information.

In the event of a **power failure at the polling location**:

- Immediately report this to the registrar.
- The general registrar must report the outage to their ERS Liaison. The following information will be requested:
 - Contact information of person reporting the outage (specifically a call-back phone number).
 - Exact location of the outage (the complete physical address).
 - If known, approximate time the outage occurred.
 - If known, the name of the power company.
 - Did the outage interrupt the voting process in any way? If so, how?
 - Is there any known damage to any of the equipment?
- Report the problem to the facility's custodial or the management staff.
- Continue voting on available ballots, using provisional ballots as needed if electronic pollbooks are unavailable.

In the event the **ballot box fills**, officers of election may open the ballot container and empty the ballots with the following safeguards:

- The optical scan ballot container shall be opened in plain sight of any authorized party representatives or other observers and, once the ballots have been deposited into an

²⁴ See [§24.2-1009](#) (willfully tampering with records and documents used in the electoral process is a Class 5 felony).



auxiliary ballot container, both ballot containers shall remain in plain sight in the polling place.

- Any such auxiliary ballot container used shall have a lock and key and an opening of sufficient size to admit a single folded or unfolded ballot and no more.²⁵
- At least two officers of election, representing both political parties, must transfer the ballots.²⁶ Two members of one single party may transfer the ballots if the election taking place is a single-party primary.

11.5. ELECTION DAY COMPLAINTS

One of the most important responsibilities of state and local election officials is to ensure the transparent and fair operation of elections. In support of this endeavor, local election officials should ensure that all Election Day workers are trained in Election Day procedures and be prepared with appropriate responses to any complaints or violations. The purpose of this section is to discuss election officials' responses to complaints and violations that may occur.

11.5.1. Election Day Complaints

Voters should make complaints directly to the local general registrar or to the Department of Elections at any time. Complaints can range from a polling place having a long line to voting equipment being inaccessible. Election officials should take each complaint seriously and decide what solutions they can provide and be aware of when complaints or conflicts should be escalated to the proper authorities. Generally, complaints can be categorized into informal and formal (HAVA). Election officials who witness Election Day violations or receive complaints should document the incident or complaint using the Incident Report Form (found in [FormsWarehouse under Election Management](#)).²⁷

11.5.2. Informal Complaints

Local election officials can receive informal complaints from any voter; thus, procedures should be in place to handle complaints or conflicts and officials should aim to resolve these issues on the local level. Voters may also make informal complaints directly to the Department of Elections. Complaints filed [online](#), by e-mail, or received by phone to the Department will immediately be emailed to the general registrar. If the complaint is time sensitive the email will be followed by a phone call. Direct voters to the Department of Elections [website](#) for information on how to file formal and informal complaints.

²⁵ See [§24.2-623](#).

²⁶ See Virginia Admin. Code [1VAC20-60-50](#).

²⁷ See HAVA, [52 U.S.C. §21081 et. seq.](#)

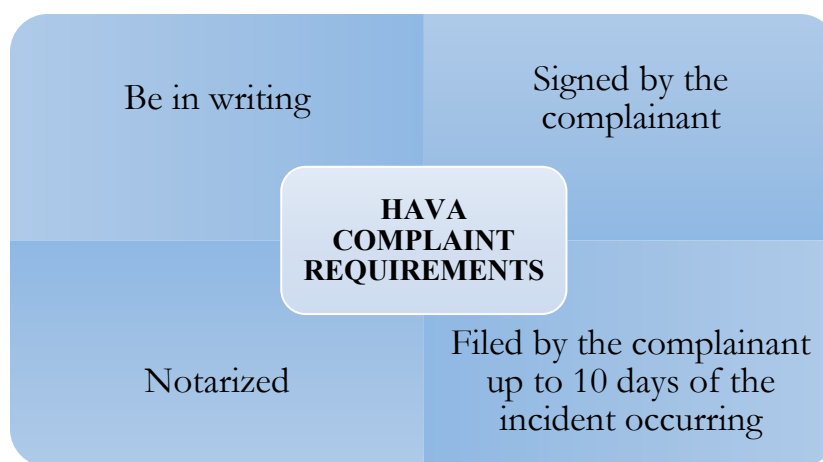


11.5.3. HAVA Complaints

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 made reforms to America's voting process by establishing minimum standards for states regarding election administration.²⁸ Subchapter III of HAVA contains standards regarding voting systems, provisional voting and voting information, a computerized statewide voter registration list, and requirements for first-time voters who register by mail.²⁹ HAVA standards are critical to the operation of an election.

§21112 of HAVA requires states to establish a procedure for Election Day complaints. Therefore, the State Board of Elections developed regulation 1VAC20-20-80 and the HAVA Administrative Complaint Procedure.³⁰ The form and procedure can be found in [FormsWarehouse under Election Management](#).

HAVA complaints will fall into two categories: informal and formal.



A HAVA complaint must be in writing, signed by the complainant, notarized, and filed up to 10 days before or after the incident occurs. If a complaint is improperly notarized, please report the notary to the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The ELECT-15512 HAVA Complaint form should be available at each polling location for voters, though voters are not required to use the Department's form to file their HAVA complaint.

The Department of Elections determines the severity of the complaint and whether a complaint is formal or informal. HAVA requires complaints be resolved within 90 days or referred to alternative dispute resolution as per 52 U.S.C § 21112.³¹ If necessary, the Department will contact the general registrar or local electoral board for information concerning the complaint. The general registrar and local electoral board will be allowed an opportunity to review the Department's proposed response.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ See Virginia Admin. Code [1VAC20-20-80](#).

³¹ See HAVA, 52 U.S.C. [§21112](#).



11.6. ELECTION DAY OFFENSES

Local election officials may witness or receive complaints regarding violations outside the scope of their authority. An official should know what situations should be referred to authorities and what situations can be handled within their office.



Best Practices

Properly training Election Day workers is the best way officials can prevent confusion and misunderstandings that might lead to offenses.

Ensure workers know where the ELECT-604 Prohibited Areas and Activities poster is displayed in their precinct and have access to a copy of the Do's and Don'ts for Campaigners and Authorized Representatives.

11.6.1. Common Election Day Offenses

Loitering within the prohibited 40-foot boundary area of a polling place is probably the most frequent Election Day violation as per § 24.2-604.³² Usually, officers of election warn such violators before taking legal action. If a violator repeatedly refuses to heed such a warning, then law enforcement assistance may be requested.

Offenses relating to assisting voters: Any voter who needs assistance in preparing his ballot because of a physical disability or inability to read or write (including those with limited English proficiency) can request such assistance per § 24.2-649.³³ The assistant (who may be an officer of election) must cast the ballot for the voter according to the direction of that voter. The assistant cannot in any way influence the decision of the voter nor divulge how the person voted. Violation of any of these laws related to assistance is punishable as a Class 1 misdemeanor and may be a felony if related to absentee voting or false statements per § 24.2-649(D).³⁴

11.6.2. Campaign Finance Related Offenses: Reporting and Advertising

The general registrar is required to perform certain duties relating to the filing of campaign finance reports, assessing civil penalties, and referring matters to the Commonwealth's attorney. Candidates or committees looking to appeal civil campaign finance penalties assessed by a general registrar may be directed to the Department of Elections website [e](#).

Campaign-related offenses are, for the most part, otherwise outside the scope of local election officials' authority.

Complaints about campaign telephone calls to solicit or convey information for participating candidates or political parties are also not within the scope of the authority of the local election official. Political calls are not covered by federal or state "Do Not Call" laws and lists. Voters may ask political parties and committees voluntarily to remove the voter's information from their contact lists.

³² See [§24.2-604](#).

³³ See [§24.2-649](#).

³⁴ *Id.*



The local government is responsible for enforcing ordinances such as the placement of campaign signs.³⁵ Refer these complaints to the city or county attorney or administrator.

Voters wishing to file complaints related to Stand By Your Ad laws may be directed to the Department of Elections [website form](#). Beginning July 1, 2026, voters or campaign donors may also file complaints with the Department of Elections relating to the impermissible use of campaign funds for personal use.

11.6.3. Violations of Federal Law

Questions or complaints regarding violations of federal laws should be directed to the appropriate United States Attorney for the geographic area ([Eastern](#) or [Western](#) District of Virginia) or to the [United States Department of Justice Voting Rights Section](#).

11.6.4. Severe Offenses

Local election officials often receive complaints regarding issues outside the scope of their authority. When this occurs, the official should refer the complainant to the appropriate authorities. Officials may also witness violations and should be prepared to document and report these violations. The Department of Elections staff, local election officials, or the public may report an alleged violation of any provision of Title 24.2 to the Commonwealth's Attorney as per the Code of Virginia § 24.2-1019.³⁶ Questions regarding state offenses and suspected violations of state law should be directed to the Commonwealth's Attorney for the locality in which the incident allegedly occurred or may be directed to the Virginia Attorney General.

³⁵ See [§15.2-109](#).

³⁶ See [§24.2-1019](#).



APPENDIX A: EMERGENCY REPRODUCTION OF BALLOTS

SBE Policy 2008-004 defines inoperable or unavailable equipment for the purposes of Code of Virginia §§ 24.2-642 and 24.2-646.1, which allow for the use of paper ballots, and the reproduction of emergency paper ballots by the officers at the polls in certain emergency situations.³⁷ SBE Policy 2008-004 “Inoperable Equipment” and 2008-011 “Unavailable Voting Equipment,” are available on the Department of Elections [website](#).³⁸

The Department of Elections also granted permission to all localities which used optical scan ballots for any precinct (including absentee voting), to use the optical scan ballot or a copy of the optical scan ballot in lieu of the official paper ballot.

When distributing election materials to the polling locations, ensure each precinct is provided with a master copy of ELECT-646.1 Authorization to Reproduce Ballots (found in [Formswarehouse under Emergency Procedures](#)). Chief and assistant chief officers should be instructed on the purpose and use of this form in their training, which should also include examples of situations in which such reproduction might be needed. Emergency supplies should include copies of the form and instructions.

Before the election, the electoral board or general registrar for each polling place should determine if a copy machine is available for officer use, and how the officers can obtain access to it, especially before and after normal business hours. If there is no access to a copy machine at the polling location, the Chief should know where the nearest quick copy store is, and its hours.

Such copying capability might also be needed if the polling hours are extended by court order and the number of provisional ballot envelopes runs low and cannot be resupplied in time to continue voting without interruption.³⁹ If additional provisional ballot envelopes are needed, an officer may photocopy both sides of a blank provisional ballot envelope to be attached to a plain envelope or securely wrapped and sealed around the outside of the folded paper or optical scan ballot (with the information normally on the envelope visible, but the ballot kept private) if no plain envelopes are available. **Do not staple through any ballot.**

³⁷ See [§§ 24.2-642, 24.2-646.1](#) (explaining when emergency equipment may be allowed).

³⁸ See SBE Policy [2008-004](#) Definition of Inoperable Equipment, and [2008-011](#) “Definition of Unavailable Equipment”.

³⁹ See [§24.2-653\(C\)](#) (explaining the circumstances in which a court may extend the polling hours).



APPENDIX B: COURT EXTENDS POLLING HOURS

In any situation where the officers of election are notified that the polling hours have been extended by court order, any person who offers to vote after the normal closing time of 7 p.m. must vote a provisional ballot. **This does not apply to voters who are in line at 7 p.m.**⁴⁰

- If news of the extended hours did not come from the general registrar or electoral board or via delivery of an official copy of the order from the court, the chief or assistant chief officer should immediately attempt to verify the extension with the registrar or electoral board. If a copy of the order is delivered to the polling place, the chief or assistant chief should immediately inform the general registrar or electoral board of its receipt and contents.
- Estimate the number of extra paper or optical scan ballots and provisional ballot envelopes that will be needed during the extended polling hours (all voters during that time must vote provisional ballots) and ask the general registrar or electoral board to have them delivered to the polling place. If there is not enough time to have them delivered, proceed with the stock on hand and use the procedures for emergency paper ballots, only if approved by the electoral board.⁴¹ If additional provisional ballot envelopes are needed, an officer may photocopy both sides of a blank provisional ballot envelope to be attached to a plain envelope or securely wrapped and sealed around the outside of the folded paper or optical scan ballot (with the information normally on the envelope visible, but the ballot kept private) if no plain envelopes are available. **Do not staple through any ballot.** Provisional voting envelopes can also be printed from [FormsWarehouse under Election Management](#) or stored on a flash drive.
- All qualified voters who are in line when polls would normally close must vote in the usual manner.
- Any voter entering the line after the normal closing time, but before the extended closing time, must vote by provisional ballot.
 - Keep a separate running count of the number of provisional ballots issued after the normal poll closing time. What one judge orders, a higher court may overturn, so the ballots and counts must be kept separate.
 - These voters may also be voting a provisional ballot for any of the usual reasons, such as lack of ID, therefore all applicable reasons should be marked.
 - These voters will not be marked with a pollbook count number to indicate that they have voted but will be listed in the same manner as other provisional voters.

These ballots will be counted and added to the results by the electoral board; they are not counted at the polls by the officers.⁴²
- After all voters in line by the extended poll closing time have voted, proceed to close the polls and report the results normally. If extra lines or comments must be added to the Statement of Results to separately account for the ballots cast after the normal poll closing time, do so before the Statement is signed and the materials are sealed.

⁴⁰ See [§24.2-653\(C\)](#).

⁴¹ See [§24.2-642](#).

⁴² See Chapter 13 Provisional Ballots.

