



Ohio Revised Code

Section 3505.21 Appointment of challengers and witnesses.

Effective: January 24, 2020

Legislation: Senate Bill 52 - 133rd General Assembly

(A) As used in this section :

(1) " During the casting of the ballots" includes any of the following:

(a) Any time during which a board of elections permits an elector to vote an absent voter's ballot in person at the office of the board;

(b) Any time ballots may be cast in a precinct polling place on the day of an election;

(c) Any time during which a board of elections processes absent voter's ballots before the time for counting those ballots.

(2) "During the counting of the ballots" includes any time during which the election officials count and tally ballots, make the official canvass of election returns, or conduct an audit of the official results of an election.

(B) At any primary, special, or general election, any political party supporting candidates to be voted upon at such election and any group of five or more candidates may appoint to the board of elections or to any of the precincts in the county or city one person, a qualified elector, who shall serve as observer for such party or such candidates during the casting of the ballots and during the counting of the ballots; provided that separate observers may be appointed to serve during the casting and during the counting of the ballots. No candidate, no uniformed peace officer as defined by section 2935.01 of the Revised Code, no uniformed state highway patrol trooper, no uniformed member of any fire department, no uniformed member of the armed services, no uniformed member of the organized militia, no person wearing any other uniform, and no person carrying a firearm or other deadly weapon shall serve as an observer, nor shall any candidate be represented by more than one observer at any one precinct or at the board of elections except that a candidate who is a member of a party controlling committee, as defined in section 3517.03 of the Revised Code, may serve as an



observer.

(C) Any political party or group of candidates appointing observers shall notify the board of elections of the names and addresses of its appointees and the precincts at which they shall serve or that they will serve at the board of elections. Notification of observers appointed to serve on the day of an election shall take place not less than eleven days before the day of the election on forms prescribed by the secretary of state and may be amended by filing an amendment with the board of elections at any time until four p.m. of the day before the election. Notification of observers appointed to serve at the office of the board during the time absent voter's ballots may be cast in person or during the time in which the board processes absent voter's ballots before the time for counting those ballots shall take place not less than eleven days before absent voter's ballots are required to be ready for use pursuant to section 3509.01 of the Revised Code on forms prescribed by the secretary of state and may be amended by filing an amendment with the board of elections at any time until four p.m. of the day before the observer is appointed to serve. The observer serving on behalf of a political party shall be appointed in writing by the chairperson and secretary of the respective controlling party committee. Observers serving for any five or more candidates shall have their certificates signed by those candidates. Observers appointed to a precinct may file their certificates of appointment with the voting location manager of the precinct at the meeting on the evening prior to the election, or with the voting location manager of the precinct on the day of the election. Observers appointed to the office of the board to observe the casting of absent voter's ballots in person prior to the day of the election or the processing of absent voter's ballots before the time for counting those ballots may file their certificates with the director of the board of elections the day before or on the day that the observers are scheduled to serve at the office of the board.

Upon the filing of a certificate, the person named as observer in the certificate shall be permitted to be in and about the applicable polling place during the casting of the ballots and shall be permitted to watch every proceeding of the precinct election officials from the time of the opening until the closing of the polls. The observer also may inspect the counting of all ballots in the polling place or board of elections from the time of the closing of the polls until the counting is completed and the final returns are certified and signed. Observers appointed to serve at the board of elections on the day of an election under this section may observe at the board of elections and may observe at any precinct in the county. The precinct election officials shall protect such observers in all of the rights and privileges granted to them by Title XXXV of the Revised Code.



(D) No persons other than the precinct election officials, the observers, a police officer, other persons who are detailed to any precinct on request of the board of elections, or the secretary of state or the secretary of state's legal representative shall be admitted to the polling place, or any room in which a board of elections is counting ballots, after the closing of the polls until the counting, certifying, and signing of the final returns of each election have been completed.

(E) Not later than four p.m. of the twentieth day prior to an election at which questions are to be submitted to a vote of the people, any committee that in good faith advocates or opposes a measure may file a petition with the board of any county asking that the petitioners be recognized as the committee entitled to appoint observers to the count at the election. If more than one committee alleging themselves to advocate or oppose the same measure file such a petition, the board shall decide and announce by registered mail to each committee not less than twelve days immediately preceding the election which committee is recognized as being entitled to appoint observers. The decision shall not be final, but any aggrieved party may institute mandamus proceedings in the court of common pleas of the county in which the board has jurisdiction to compel the precinct election officials to accept the appointees of such aggrieved party. Any such recognized committee may appoint an observer to the count in each precinct. Committees appointing observers shall notify the board of elections of the names and addresses of its appointees and the precincts at which they shall serve. Notification shall take place not less than eleven days before the election on forms prescribed by the secretary of state and may be amended by filing an amendment with the board of elections at any time until four p.m. on the day before the election. A person so appointed shall file the person's certificate of appointment with the voting location manager in the precinct in which the person has been appointed to serve. Observers shall file their certificates before the polls are closed. In no case shall more than six observers be appointed for any one election in any one precinct. If more than three questions are to be voted on, the committees which have appointed observers may agree upon not to exceed six observers, and the precinct election officials shall appoint such observers. If such committees fail to agree, the precinct election officials shall appoint six observers from the appointees so certified, in such manner that each side of the several questions shall be represented.

(F) No person shall serve as an observer at any precinct or at the board of elections unless the board of elections of the county in which such observer is to serve has first been notified of the name, address, and location at which such observer is to serve. Notification to the board of elections shall



be given by the political party, group of candidates, or committee appointing such observer as prescribed in this section. No such observers shall receive any compensation from the county, municipal corporation, or township, and they shall take the following oath, to be administered by one of the precinct election officials:

"You do solemnly swear that you will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties as an official observer, assigned by law; that you will not cause any delay to persons offering to vote; and that you will not disclose or communicate to any person how any elector has voted at such election."