

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ELECTIONS GUIDELINES FOR NEWS MEDIA DURING ELECTIONS

These guidelines provide an overview of the restrictions applicable to media outlets and their activities inside polling locations on Election Day. News media representatives may visit, film and photograph inside Virginia polling places on Election Day for a reasonable and limited period of time while the polls are open. Media representatives may not disrupt the smooth operation of the election; voters and officers of election must not feel uncomfortable with their presence or have their privacy violated.

Before Election Day:

While the Department highly recommends that all media outlets contact the general registrar of the relevant locality prior to visiting any polling locations on Election Day, Va. Code § 24.2-604 states “the officers of election shall permit representatives of the news media to visit and film and photograph inside the polling location for a reasonable and limited period of time while the polls are open.” Certain restrictions apply, e.g., such as the media is prohibited from hindering or delaying a voter in any way. Further, if a majority of the officers of election conclude that the media outlet is not complying with state law, then the officers of election are authorized to require any news outlet to leave the polling location.

Again, the Department recommends that any media outlet planning or considering filming on Election Day contact the general registrar well in advance of the election. You can find contact information for individual registrar offices on the Department of Elections’ (ELECT) website (elections.virginia.gov). Pursuant to Va. Code § 24.2-604.

On Election Day:

- ✓ Media representatives are permitted inside the polling place only when the polls are open (6:00am to 7:00pm).
 - In the polling place, no person may hinder or delay a voter, give or show any ballot or campaign material to any person, solicit or influence any person in voting, hinder or delay any officer of election, be in a position to see a marked ballot of any other voter, or in any way impede the conduct of the election.
- ✓ A 40-foot Prohibited Area surrounds the entrance to all polling places. Election officials will clearly demarcate this Prohibited Area.
 - When the polls are open and ballots are being counted, within the 40-foot Prohibited Area, no person can loiter or congregate, give or show any ballot, ticket or campaign material to any person or to in any way attempt to influence any person in casting their vote, nor hinder a voter in entering or leaving the polling place.
- ✓ Contact the Chief Officer of Election upon entering the voting area. ***Be prepared to display media credentials or identification when requested.*** The length of any visit is restricted to a reasonable and limited period of time.

Prohibited Activities:

- ✓ In the polling place, you may not film or photograph any person who asks the media representative not to film or photograph her. Equipment should be placed so as not to show the faces of those attempting to vote or hinder the flow of voting.
- ✓ No filming or photographing may be performed in a way that divulges how any individual is voting.
- ✓ You may not film or photograph any voter list, pollbook, or record in a way that reveals voter information.
- ✓ Interviews or discussions with voters, election officials, authorized representatives, and others are also prohibited inside the Prohibited Area and polling place. Any interviews with voters, candidates or other persons, live broadcasts, or taping reporters’ remarks must be conducted **outside the polling place and the prohibited area.**
- ✓ Media representatives shall not impede the voting process or the work of the polling place staff.

- ✓ Officers of election may require any person who is found by a majority of the officers to be in violation of the laws governing activities in the polling place to leave the polling place and the Prohibited Area.

Questions or Concerns? Please contact the Virginia Department of Elections at 1-800-552-9745.

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