



Secretary of State

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Voting Centers and Ballot Deposit Sites

Elections Clearinghouse Notice

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This Clearinghouse summarizes important laws and rules pertaining to voting centers and ballot deposit sites, and replaces Clearinghouse #14-04 issued July 1, 2014.

Every County Auditor must provide at least *two* locations for voters to deposit ballots beginning eighteen days prior to Election Day and ending at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. The locations may be a voting center or a drop box and must be located in different geographical locations.

Additionally, RCW 29A.40.160 requires that voter registration be offered at the following locations:

- At the Auditor's Office.
- At the division of elections, if located in a different city from the Auditor's Office.
- During a Presidential general election, at a voting center in each city with a population of 100,000 or more.

The attached chart, "Voting Center and Deposit Site Requirements," specifies further requirements for voting centers, staffed and unstaffed deposit sites.

What is a voting center?

A voting center issues replacement ballots, provisional ballots, or offers voting on a direct recording electronic (DRE) device. If an accessible voting unit prints votes on a paper ballot, it is not a DRE.

Each County Auditor opens a voting center each primary, special, and general election. The County Auditor may provide election services at other locations and may determine which services are provided as well as the days and hours of operation. Student Hubs are not voting centers. (See ["ESB 6313 Advisory #2 - Student Engagement Hubs"](#)) (RCW 29A.40.180)

At least one voting center must be open during business hours during the voting period, which begins eighteen days before, and ends at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Voting centers are fully accessible locations that offer voting in a manner that provides for voter privacy.

The “Americans with Disabilities Act Checklist for Polling Places” shall be used when determining the accessibility of a voting center.

For each voting center, the County Auditor must have a contingency plan to accommodate accessible voting in the event that an accessible voting unit (AVU) or a direct recording electronic (DRE) device malfunctions.

For accessible voting units that produce a voted paper ballot, voters place their marked ballot in a security envelope and a return envelope with a signed declaration. The voter may deposit their ballot at the voting center drop box or a ballot deposit site no later than 8:00 p.m. on the date of the election, or return by mail with a valid postmark on or before Election Day.

If the voting center offers voting on a DRE, the County Auditor shall require the voter to sign the ballot declaration provided in WAC 434-230-015. Ballot declaration signatures may not be maintained in the chronological order in which they were signed. The County Auditor must either verify the signature on the ballot declaration against the signature in the voter registration record; or require the voter to provide photo identification, consistent with RCW 29A.40.160.

Sample ballots that meet the requirements in RCW 29A.36.115 may be used as provisional ballots.

Other required materials include: (WAC 434-250-105)

- Provisional ballot packet materials.
- Sample ballots – if not published in the local voters’ pamphlet. (WAC 434-230-010)
- Voters’ pamphlets – state and local when applicable.
- Voter registration forms.
- Voter information required by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).
- Date of the election.
- Instructions on how to mark the ballot.
- Materials in alternative languages if required.
- Other required notices as applicable.

RCW 29A.84.510 prohibits practices that interfere with the voting process during the 18-day voting period and on Election Day. Within a voting center, no person may:

- Attempt to suggest or persuade any voter to vote for or against any candidate or ballot measure.
- Circulate cards or handbills of any kind.
- Solicit signatures to any kind of petition.
- Engage in any practice which interferes with the freedom of voters to exercise their franchise or disrupts election administration.
- Obstruct the doors or entries to a building in which a voting center or ballot deposit site is located.

At exactly 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, all ballot boxes must be emptied or secured to prevent the deposit of additional ballots. However, any voter who is in a voting center or in line at a voting center at 8:00 p.m. must be allowed to vote and deposit their ballot.

All requirements for staffed deposit sites apply to voting centers. For further details about voting center availability, notices, or required materials please refer to the attached chart.

What is a ballot deposit site?

If a location only receives ballots and does not issue ballots, the site is either a staffed or unstaffed deposit site. Ballot deposit boxes may be located in other locations where voter services are provided. Staffed deposit sites must be staffed by at least two people.

All ballot deposit boxes must be secured with seals and logs that document each time the box is opened or sealed and by whom. The box must be emptied by two people authorized by the County Auditor as often as needed to prevent damage to the ballots and unauthorized access. After emptying a ballot box, two people secure the ballots in a container using seals and logs for transportation. Ballots may be transported by one person if the ballots are sealed into the transport container by two people.

Unstaffed ballot boxes located outdoors must be constructed of durable material able to withstand weather, removal, and vandalism. No one may electioneer, circulate campaign materials, solicit petition signatures, or impede the voting process within twenty-five feet of a ballot deposit site that is not located within a voting center.

At exactly 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, all ballot boxes must be emptied or secured to prevent the deposit of additional ballots. Any voter who is in line at 8:00 p.m. may vote and deposit their ballot. If a ballot is returned after the ballot box is emptied or secured at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, the ballot must be referred to the Canvassing Board.

A ballot box may be closed and the deposit slot sealed by a single person to prevent the deposit of ballots after 8:00 p.m. if:

- The person does not have access to the deposited ballots, and
- Before sealing the deposit slot, the person records the seal number on a log and places the log inside the ballot box.

The slot is then closed and secured with the numbered seal. A team of two people must remove the ballots at a later time and verify the seal and log.

For further requirements please refer to the attached chart or contact the [Certification & Training Program](#) if you have questions.

Location Type:	Voting Center <i>WAC 434-250-105, RCW 29A.40.160</i>	Staffed Deposit Site <i>WAC 434-250-100</i>	Unstaffed Deposit Site <i>WAC 434-250-100</i>
Receives Ballots?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issues Ballots?	Yes – AVU and provisional ballots are required; replacement ballots optional. Ballot materials must include a voter declaration.	No	No
Staffing	Attended at all times by at least two staff members or qualified appointees. Must subscribe to oath.	Attended at all times by at least two staff members or qualified appointees. Must subscribe to oath.	Not staffed except when box is emptied; two staff members or qualified appointees must be present when box is accessed or emptied.
Appointee Qualifications If not county employees.	Representatives of different major political parties whenever possible, who subscribe to oath of duties.	Representatives of different major political parties whenever possible, who subscribe to oath of duties.	County Auditor employees or appointees.
Site Hours	As a voting center, the County Auditor’s Office must be open during regular office hours beginning the day ballots are mailed until Election Day (excluding weekends and legal holidays). Other locations, dates, and times are established by the Auditor. On Election Day, all voting centers must remain open until 8:00 pm.	Dates and times as established by the County Auditor and open until 8:00 pm on Election Day.	Open 18 days prior to the election and until 8:00 pm on Election Day.

Location Type:	Voting Center <i>WAC 434-250-105, RCW 29A.40.160</i>	Staffed Deposit Site <i>WAC 434-250-100</i>	Unstaffed Deposit Site <i>WAC 434-250-100</i>
Accessibility	<p>Must be located in an accessible environment free of barriers to the mobility or functioning of voters. This includes the routes of travel to and through buildings used for voting. Offers accessible voting in a manner that provides for voter privacy.</p> <p>AVU is available during business hours, beginning 18 days before, and ends at 8 pm on Election Day.</p>	As appropriate.	As appropriate.
Signage	<p>Must display current HAVA required information (may be the HAVA poster), date of the election, instructions on how to mark a ballot, and signage outside the building indicating it as a place for voting.</p>	As appropriate.	As appropriate.
Notices	<p>The Notice of Election must include information on how a voter can obtain a ballot, including the locations, dates, and hours of voting centers and other appropriate locations. (RCW 29A.52.355)</p> <p>During a primary or general election that includes a partisan office, display the appropriate notice provided in WAC 434-230-015.</p>		

Location Type:	Voting Center <i>WAC 434-250-105, RCW 29A.40.160</i>	Staffed Deposit Site <i>WAC 434-250-100</i>	Unstaffed Deposit Site <i>WAC 434-250-100</i>
Security	<p>For DREs only: Must verify a voter has not cast a ballot before a voter may vote; require identification or signature comparison; provide declaration forms for voters to sign.</p> <p>Ballot box secured at all times; documentation of access to ballots; and accountability of all ballots issued.</p> <p>At 8:00 pm on Election Day, all ballot boxes must be emptied or secured after all voters who were in line at 8:00 have voted and deposited their ballots.</p> <p>Within the voting center, no person may impede the voting process. <i>See RCW 29A.84.510; WAC 434-250-150.</i></p>	<p>Must be secured at all times with seal logs that document each instance a box is accessed and by whom. Deposit boxes may be accessed by authorized staff only. Sealed containers must be used when transporting ballots. At 8:00 pm on Election Day, all ballot boxes must be emptied or secured.</p> <p>Within 25 ft., no person may electioneer or interfere with the voting process. The County Auditor may contact a law enforcement agency for assistance if necessary to maintain order.</p>	<p>Must be secured at all times with seals and logs maintained to document each instance a box is accessed and by whom. Deposit boxes must be emptied by authorized staff only; constructed to withstand weather, removal, and vandalism. Site must be emptied often enough to prevent damage to ballots and unauthorized access to ballots. Containers secured with numbered seals must be used when transporting ballots. At 8:00 pm on Election Day, all ballot boxes must be emptied or secured.</p> <p>Within 25 ft., no person may electioneer or interfere with the voting process. The County Auditor may contact a law enforcement agency for assistance if necessary to maintain order.</p>
Other Supplies	<p>Voters' pamphlets, sample ballots; voter registration forms; instructions on how to mark the ballot; election materials in alternate language(s) when mandated; notices as applicable.</p>		