



SB308 Election Law – Chief Election Judges – Party Affiliation
Senators Simonaire, Brooks, and Kagan
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Election Judges are essential in the administration of our elections. Recruitment of Election Judges has always been a difficult and trying task for the local boards of elections. Efforts by the General Assembly have assisted greatly. For example, the law permits the appointment of an election judge from outside the county in which they are serving and invites residents as young as 16 years old to participate in the administration of the election. Additionally, the law permits the appointment of registered voters as election judges who are not affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican Parties. The reason for the expansion of election judge recruitment was simple. We need individuals to serve. It is in this context that SB 308 seeks to amend the appointment provision relating to the assignment of election judges to polling places.

SBE and the local boards strive to ensure that the polling place is a neutral, coercion-free area for Maryland's voters to cast their in-person ballots. Election Judges administer the election without regard to partisanship. They are prohibited from engaging in partisan or political activity during their work as an election judge. They are trained how to conduct the necessary tasks to keep a polling place running efficiently and effectively through 13-hour early voting days and election day without purposefully or incidentally affecting a voter's experience in the voting room. Our election judges check politics at the door, and that the no-electioneering zone around a polling place applies to everyone inside it. It is imperative for the integrity of the electoral process and important to stress, election judges operate and are trained to conduct the election in a nonpartisan manner and fashion.

An election judge's partisan affiliation does not impact or determine the outcome of the election. Voters decide the outcomes of elections. The party affiliation of an election judge does not stop them from casting their ballots nor disenfranchise a voter. Any complaints about an election judge regarding their fitness, qualifications, or performance, are taken seriously and investigated. If an election judge oversteps, the local board of elections has the authority to remove that election judge.

Given the variety of roles and duties an election judge may engage in during polling place operations, numerical parity of party affiliation alone does not, and cannot, ensure the neutral sanctity of the polling place; the law does. Numerical parity is often impossible to achieve in nearly every county of the State, given the demographic realities local boards face. This legislation codifies existing practices while directing the local board of elections to attempt to achieve parity of the two major political parties but understanding that the mission is to ensure voters can cast their ballots and assist in our recruitment of election judges.

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