

2026 ELECTION
GUIDE



**THE REGISTER
JUDGE**



The Register Judge

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***Disclaimer:** This guide does not cover all election duties and responsibilities.
Election Administrators and Election Judges are obligated to follow Montana law.*

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The Register Judge

There are few roles as critical to our democracy as the job of an election judge. On election day, a citizen's right to cast a ballot and have the vote count rests in the hands of the election judge.

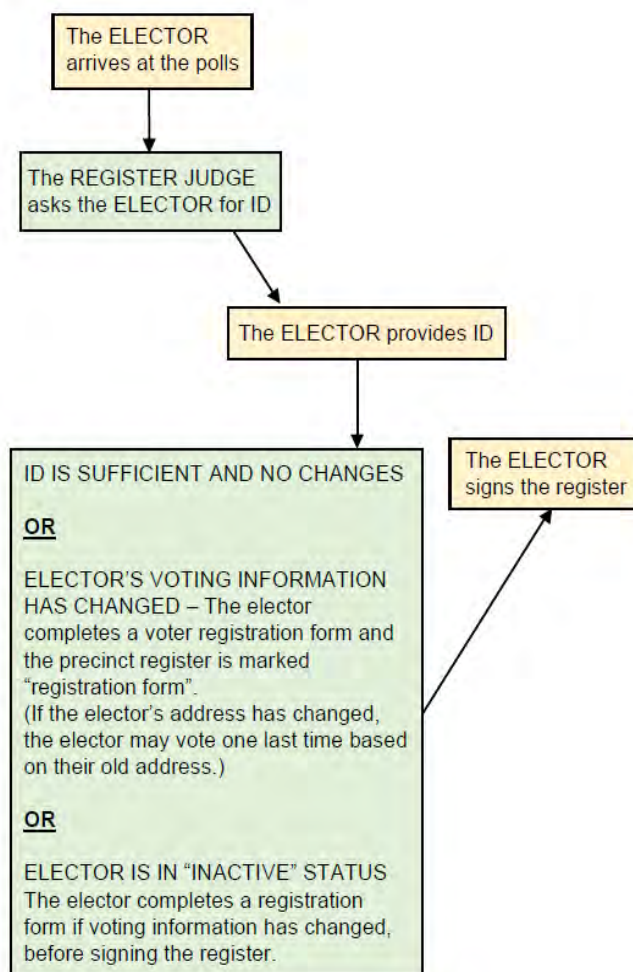
Montana statute defines an elector as an individual qualified to vote under state law. One important component of the qualification process is identification. By requiring proper identification, election officials can verify a voter's eligibility and defend against fraudulent activities.

The Register Judge's job is to confirm the elector's identity and eligibility to vote. The Register Judge requests the elector's ID and verifies it is an acceptable form of identification. All electors must present acceptable identification to vote at the polls on election day.

Polling Place Identification

Montana permits electors a variety of options for in-person voter identification:

- Montana driver's license,
 - State identification card,
 - Military identification card,
 - Tribal photo identification card,
 - US Passport,
 - Montana concealed carry permit, **or**
 - A student photo identification card issued by the MT university system or a school that is a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics;
- OR
- A current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck, government check, or other government document that shows the elector's name **and** current address AND photo identification that shows the elector's name.



Signing the Register

The Register Judge instructs the elector to state their name and address, locates the elector's name in the register, and, if the identification process is successful, instructs the elector to sign the register.

The elector is unable to sign the register:

If an elector is unable to sign the register, instruct them to mark the spot with a fingerprint or another identifying mark, such as an X, and note in the register you witnessed the elector marking the register. If the elector is unable to provide a fingerprint or identifying mark and does not have a designated agent, the election judge (or the Election Administrator) may sign for the elector after verifying the elector's ID.

Assisting Electors with Voting Eligibility

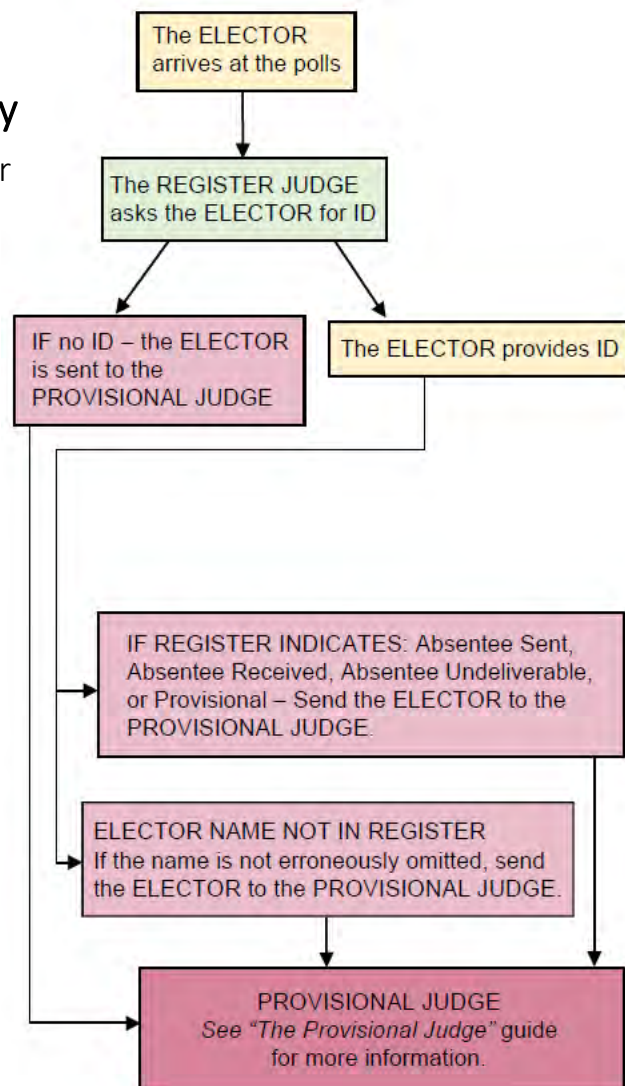
On election day, election judges will encounter situations that must be resolved before the elector may cast their ballot.

The following are common situations that election judges encounter in a polling place setting.

The elector's ID differs from information in the register:

If the elector's ID has information that differs from the register, but the election judge determines the information provided is sufficient to verify the elector's identity and eligibility to vote, the elector may sign the register and vote a **regular ballot**.

If the information in the register is incorrect, the elector should complete a new voter registration form to update their information, and they may vote a **regular ballot**.



Note: If the elector has moved outside of the county, they may vote one last time based on their former address ([13-2-512, MCA](#)).

The elector provides an unacceptable or insufficient form of ID for verification of identity and eligibility to vote:

If the elector did not bring an acceptable form of ID, the elector may choose to return to the polling place with the required identification and vote a **regular ballot**.

If the elector is unable to meet the ID requirement, the elector may vote a **provisional ballot**.

The elector's name is not in the register:

If the elector's name is not in the register, call the election office to verify if the elector's name was omitted erroneously.

- If the elector was omitted erroneously from the register, have the elector complete the *Certificate of Erroneous Omission* form. The elector may vote a **regular ballot**. ([ARM 44.3.2111](#))
- If the election office cannot confirm the elector was erroneously omitted from the register, the elector may vote a **provisional ballot**.

 **Note:** *If the elector chooses not to vote a provisional ballot, direct them to the election office or designated location to resolve the omission.*

An inactive elector appears at the polling place to vote:

An elector can be placed in "Inactive" status for a variety of reasons established in law ([13-2-220, MCA](#), [ARM 44.3.2014](#)). These reasons include not responding to correspondence during annual voter list maintenance or having a ballot returned to the election office as undeliverable in a mail ballot election.

An inactive elector may reactivate their registration on election day by appearing at the polling place or by requesting an absentee ballot. The elector may vote a **regular ballot** on election day at the county election office or a central location designated by the county Election Administrator (which may include the polling place). See [13-2-222, MCA](#) and [ARM 44.3.2015](#).

 **Note:** *An inactive elector should fill out a voter registration form if any information in their voter record has changed.*

The register indicates elector was issued an absentee ballot:

If the register indicates the elector was sent an absentee ballot, an absentee ballot was received for the elector, or the ballot was returned as undeliverable, send the elector to the Provisional Judge.



The elector must vote a **provisional ballot**. Inform the elector the **provisional ballot** will be counted if the **absentee ballot** was not returned.

The register indicates “Provisional” status for the elector:

If the provisionally registered elector provides the required polling place ID or other missing information and this is verified by the Election Administrator, the elector may vote a **regular ballot**.

If the provisionally registered elector does not provide the required form of ID, ID number, or other missing information, the elector may vote a **provisional ballot**.

 **Note:** *Inform the elector the provisional ballot will be counted if the elector provides verifiable ID and any applicable missing registration information to the election office by 5 pm the day following the election.*

Send the elector to the Provisional Judge. **For instructions on handling provisional ballots, see *The Provisional Judge* guide.**

The elector is challenged:

Any registered elector may challenge another elector’s right to vote by submitting an affidavit of challenge.

If an elector has been challenged and the challenge is resolved, the elector may vote a **regular ballot**.

If the challenge is not resolved, the elector may vote a **provisional ballot**.

 **Reminder!** *If the challenge is based on residency, an elector may vote one last time based on their former address. The voter must complete a voter registration form with their new address.*

The elector brings a voted absentee ballot to drop off at the polls:

On election day, electors may return absentee ballots to the election office or any polling place in the county where the elector is registered to vote. This also applies to late registrants. *For school districts, ballots can be returned to any polling place in the school district.*

- An absentee ballot dropped off at a polling place other than the one in which the elector appears on the register must be:
 - delivered to the election office by the election judges for signature verification and tabulation if tabulation of absentee ballots is done at a central location or handled as directed by the Election Administrator; **or**
 - delivered to the election office by the election judges for signature verification. If all counting is done at the precinct location, the election office will then deliver the ballot to the correct precinct or handle it as directed by the Election Administrator.

Absentee ballots dropped off at the polling place must be sealed in a secrecy envelope and then in an affirmation signature envelope. The signature envelope must be signed and dated by the elector.

When absentee electors want to vote at a polling place:

- If the elector has their unmarked absentee ballot, direct them to the voting booth. The elector should mark their ballot, place and seal it in the secrecy envelope, and then in the signature envelope. The elector must sign and date the signature envelope. When the elector is finished, confirm the envelope has been signed, then place it in the absentee ballot box or other depository designated by the Election Administrator.

 **Note:** *If the elector does not have their secrecy and signature envelopes, replacements should be provided. If replacement absentee envelopes are not available, handle the ballot as a provisional ballot so the ballot totals match at the end of the night.*

Do not deposit the ballot in a ballot box if it is not in an absentee envelope.

- If the elector does not have their absentee ballot and affirms it was not received, or was spoiled, lost, or destroyed, the elector must be issued a **provisional ballot**. The elector should be advised that if their absentee ballot was received by the election office, the provisional ballot will be rejected.

POLLING PLACE VOTING FLOW CHART

