DENVER CLERK & RECORDER
CITY CLERK | ELECTIONS | PUBLIC TRUSTEE | RECORDING
HON. PAUL D. LÓPEZ

Denver Votes!
Denver Elections Division

Watcher Guide

Last Updated 09/10/26

Introduction

Watchers, also known as election observers, are individuals who may observe steps in the election process. The role of a watcher is to observe and monitor the election without disrupting the election process or violating voter privacy.

Watchers and other types of election observers are critical to ensuring the integrity and transparency of an election process, and this activity helps foster public confidence in the honesty and fairness of electoral processes.

This guide covers critical information such as, and not limited to, who may be a watcher, what a watcher is allowed to observe, who may appoint watchers, what a watcher may and may not do, and how to appoint watchers in the City and County of Denver.

Responsibilities

Duly appointed observers may watch voting, processing, ballot counting, canvass, drop boxes, and recounts.

Provisions for watchers are found throughout Title 1 of the Colorado Revised Statutes and the Colorado Secretary of State's Election Rules, with emphasis on Election Rule 8. Statutory and rule provisions are cited throughout this guide. References to specific laws and rules are not guaranteed to constitute an exhaustive list of applicable legal provisions; they are provided in this guide as courtesy and convenience. Watchers and appointing authorities are expected and strongly advised to do their own legal research.

Audience

This guide is intended for use by watchers and their appointing authorities. This guide is for training purposes only and does not constitute, nor is a substitute for, legal advice.

Contact the Denver Elections Division with questions about watcher procedures and duties: email elections@denvergov.org or call 720-913-8683.

Location

A digital version of this guide is available on the Denver Clerk & Recorder's Election Division website at **www.DenverVotes.org** → Campaign & Candidate Resources → Watchers.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Responsibilities 1

Audience 1

Location 1

Types of Observers 3

Who May Be Appointed as a Watcher 4

Who May Not Be a Watcher 4

Appointing Authorities 5

General Election and Congressional Vacancy Election 5

Non-Partisan Election 5

Primary Election 6

Recounts 6

Designated Appointing Authorities 7

Process to Appoint Watchers 8

Watching Process 9

Watcher Certificates 9

Requirements for Watchers at Drop Boxes 9

Watching at a Voter Service and Polling Center (VSPC) 10

What Watchers May and May Not Do 11

Removal of Watchers 13

Contact Information and References 13

Revision History 14

Types of Observers

Certain individuals are granted access to observe a variety of election activities such as voting, ballot processing, ballot counting, and canvass. These individuals are certified by entities authorized by Colorado election laws and rules to participate in election observation activities.

There are three types of observers permitted at voting and election activity locations:

1. **Official Observers appointed by the Secretary of State**

These observers may be either appointed by the Secretary of State or the federal government. An Official Observer is not required to be an eligible elector in the jurisdiction in which they are allowed to observe. Official Observers must obtain a letter of authority from the Secretary of State and provide this letter to the county clerk.[1]

2. **Media Observers**

Media observers may witness all election activities.[2] All media observers must follow guidelines established by the Colorado Press Association in conjunction with the Colorado County Clerks' Association and the Colorado Secretary of State.

3. **Watchers**

Watchers are eligible electors selected and appointed by eligible appointing authorities to observe election activities. Watcher eligibility must be verified by the county clerk and must follow rules established by Colorado laws and election rules.

Note: this guide is written for the third category of observers: watchers.

[1] Colorado Election Rule 8.17.
[2] Colorado Election Rule 8.18.

Who May Be Appointed as a Watcher

A watcher is an eligible elector who is allowed to observe an individual election process or multiple stages of election operations. A watcher must be an eligible elector in the State of Colorado, appointed by an appointing entity, and their eligibility must be confirmed by the county clerk.[3]

In addition:

- If appointed by a political party chairperson on behalf of the political party, or by a party candidate at a primary election, the watcher must be registered in the statewide voter registration database (SCORE) as affiliated with that party or as unaffiliated.
    - If appointed by an unaffiliated candidate, watchers must be registered in SCORE as unaffiliated. [4]
- If appointed by a state ballot question proponent or opponent group, that group must be registered with the state as an issue committee either supporting or opposing the ballot question. The watcher must be appointed by either the issue committee's registered agent or designated agent.
- If appointed by a municipal ballot question proponent or opponent group, that group must be registered as an issue committee with the Denver Clerk & Recorder for campaign finance reporting purposes.

Note: In a General Election and in a Congressional Vacancy Election, party candidates and party officers may visit Voter Service and Polling Centers "to observe the progress of voting"[5] and no watcher certificate is required.

Who May Not Be a Watcher

A person shall not be selected as a watcher if the person has been convicted of any election offense specified in Article 13 of Title I, C.R.S.[6]

Candidates and members of their immediate families by blood, marriage, or civil union to the second degree **may not** be watchers for that candidate.[7]

A political party attorney may not be in a polling location unless they are a duly appointed watcher or they are casting their ballot.[8]

---

[3] Colorado Election Rule 8.1.
[4] Section 1-1-104 (51), C.R.S.
[5] Section 1-7-106 (1), C.R.S.
[6] Section 1-1-104 (51), C.R.S.
[7] Section 1-7-108 (2), C.R.S.
[8] Colorado Election Rule 8.3.

Appointing Authorities

Under state law, certain individuals and entities are entitled to appoint watchers, depending on the type of election.

General Election and Congressional Vacancy Election[9]

The following entities are entitled to watchers at a general election and at a congressional vacancy election:

- A political party with a candidate on the ballot.
- A registered issue committee for or against an issue on the ballot.
- An unaffiliated candidate on the ballot.
- A write-in candidate.

Appointing authorities listed above are allowed the following number of watchers*:

- One watcher per central count process. Also, the party is entitled to not less than one watcher for every ten election judges at a central count facility.
- One watcher for every four election judges during the signature verification process.
- One watcher per Voter Service and Polling Center (VSPC).

Non-Partisan Election[10]

The following entities are entitled to watchers at non-partisan elections:

- A candidate for office in a nonpartisan election
- A registered issue committee for or against an issue on the ballot

Appointing authorities listed above are allowed the following number of watchers:[11]

- One watcher per central count process.
- One watcher for every four election judges during the signature verification process.
- One watcher per VSPC in which they are a candidate or in which the issue is on the ballot.

[9] Section 1-7-106, C.R.S.
[10] Section 1-7-107, C.R.S.
[11] Colorado Election Rule 8.8.

Primary Election[12]

The following entities and candidates are entitled to watchers at primary elections:

- A political party participating in the Primary Election.
- A candidate on the ballot.

A participating political party is allowed the following number of watchers*:

- One watcher per central count process. Also, the party is entitled to not less than one watcher for every ten election judges at a central count facility.
- One watcher for every four election judges during the signature verification process.
- One watcher per VSPC.

A candidate on the ballot is allowed the following number of watchers*:

- One watcher per VSPC. A candidate is entitled to no more than one watcher at any one time at each VSPC.
- Watchers at each place votes are counted.

Recounts[13]

The following entities are entitled to watchers during recounts:

- A candidate* involved in recount.
- A registered issue committee involved in recount.
- A political party involved in recount.

During a recount, the county clerk must give priority to watchers appointed by authorities who are the subject of the recount. Others authorized to appoint watchers for that election may also be allowed access to watch recount activities, subject to space limitations and local safety codes.

[12] Section 1-7-105, C.R.S.
[13] Colorado Election Rule 8.10.2 (d).

***Important Notes**

- The number of watchers permitted in a room at one time is subject to space limitations and local safety codes.
- A candidate who is subject to a recount can appoint themselves or a family member as a watcher. Recount watching is not subject to the family relationship prohibition.
- No more than one watcher from the same appointing authority may be present at the same time at any one VSPC.

Designated Appointing Authorities

- For **political parties** (both major and minor parties), the state and county party chairs are appointing authorities who may appoint watchers.[14]
- For **issue committees**, the registered agent or designated filing agent is the appointing authority.[15]
- For **recounts**, the county party chair, candidate, or issue committee official is the appointing authority.

[14] Section 1-7-106, C.R.S.
[15] Colorado Election Rule 8.1.1.

Process to Appoint Watchers

1. **Appointing authority certifies watcher on approved form and provides the completed form to the watcher.** Appointing authorities are required to certify watchers on the Colorado Secretary of State's *Certificate of Appointment and Oath of Watcher* form. Drop box watchers have their own certificate. Appointing authorities should provide the Certificate of Appointment to watchers.
2. **Appointing authority submits watcher name(s) to county clerk for verification.** Appointing authorities are also required to submit the names of watchers to the county clerk[16] as well as information needed to verify the watcher's eligibility. To submit the information required, please use the online Watcher Submission Form available on DenverVotes.org.
    a. Appointing authorities can also email elections@denvergov.org to receive a link to the Watcher Submission Form.
    b. When submitting watcher names, the appointing authority must note whether each watcher has completed a training course provided by or approved by the Colorado Secretary of State.
    c. Location information submitted on the form must match the information provided in Section 4 of the *Certificate of Appointment and Oath of Watcher* form, or Section 6 on the drop box watcher certificate.
    d. To the extent possible, appointing authorities should submit names of watchers prior to the Friday before Election Day.[17] The Denver Clerk & Recorder's ability to verify watcher eligibility after this Friday will be severely limited.
3. **County clerk must verify the eligibility of appointed watchers before the watcher can perform their duties.** The Denver Clerk & Recorder will promptly verify the eligibility of names submitted to serve as watchers. If the watcher's eligibility cannot be confirmed, the office will notify the appointing authority and request additional information.
4. **Watcher is now certified and ready to watch election activities.** See the section below on the Watching Process for details and rules.

[16] Sections 1-7-105 and 1-7-106, C.R.S.
[17] Sections 1-7-105 (2) and 1-7-106 (1), C.R.S.

Watching Process

There are two keys to success for watchers when observing election activities:

1. **Arrive with proper watcher credentials**. Watchers must present the Certificate of Appointment at each location where the watcher is designated to observe, take an oath administered by an election judge or designated election official, and must affirm that they are qualified to act as a watcher.[18]
    a. To observe election activities where confidential or personally identifiable information may be present, the watcher must also present their approved watcher training certificate. [19]
2. **Follow all Colorado election laws and rules**.

Watcher Certificates

- A watcher may be certified to observe more than one location where election activities take place. The certificate(s) must be presented at each location.
- If a watcher leaves a location but returns to the same location, another certificate of appointment is not necessary.[20]
- A new watcher who is replacing an original watcher must provide their own certificate of appointment to the supervisor judge for that polling location.[21]
- A certificate of appointment as a watcher is not transferable to anyone else.[22]
- The watcher will keep their certificate(s) after taking the oath.

Requirements for Watchers at Drop Boxes

There are some unique requirements for watchers who wish to observe drop boxes:

- Watchers who wish to observe voters dropping ballots off at a drop box **must first** submit their Certificate of Appointment **and** proof of completion of training in-person at the county clerk's central office.[23]
    - The Denver Clerk & Recorder's Elections Front Counter is open Monday – Friday, 8am – 5pm and is located at 200 W. 14th Ave, Denver, 80204.

[18] Colorado Election Rules 8.1 and 8.4 and Section 1-7-108 (1), C.R.S.
[19] Colorado Election Rule 8.1.8.
[20] Colorado Election Rule 8.4.1.
[21] Colorado Election Rule 8.4.2.
[22] Colorado Election Rule 8.4.3.
[23] Colorado Election Rules 8.1.8 and 8.1.9.

Elections staff will administer the drop box watcher's oath and record the drop box watcher has proper credentials, including an identification badge.

- Appointing authorities must provide an identification badge to drop box watchers which states "Official election watcher for (appointing authority)" in bold-faced type that is clearly legible.
    - This badge must always be worn while observing the drop box.
    - The watcher must provide the badge for the Denver Clerk & Recorder to review at the time the watcher delivers the Certificate of Appointment.[24]
- A drop box watcher **must** complete a watcher training provided by or approved by the Secretary of State.
    - A training certificate of completion is valid until December 31 of that calendar year. An approved training may be used for one calendar year from the date approved.
    - The certificate must list the drop box locations the watcher will observe and the dates and times the watcher will observe them.[25]
- If the watcher will observe a drop box that is located within or outside of a VSPC location during hours the VSPC is open, the watcher must also present their Certificate of Appointment and training certificate to the supervisor election judge at the VSPC. [26]

Watching at a Voter Service and Polling Center (VSPC)

After presenting the watcher certificate(s) and affirming to the watcher's oath, the watcher will sign the *Observer Log* and the supervisor election judge will issue the watcher a *Watcher Badge*, which must be worn at all times while watching.

- **Gold watcher badges** are issued to watchers who have completed the approved watcher training course, presented their training certificate, and are allowed to observe steps with confidential or personally identifiable information.
- **Blue watcher badges** are issued to watchers who have not completed the approved watcher training course and/or do not present a valid training

[24] Colorado Election Rule 8.15.
[25] Colorado Election Rule 8.1.9.
[26] Colorado Election Rule 8.4.4.

certificate. These watchers are not permitted to observe steps with confidential or personally identifiable information.

- The watcher badge must be returned to the supervisor election judge when the watcher is done observing.

Reminder: no more than one watcher from the same appointing authority may be present at the same time at any VSPC.

What Watchers May and May Not Do

Watchers **may:**[27]	Watchers may **not:**[28]
• observe election activities in more than one location; the watcher certificate(s) must be presented at each location. • witness actions of election officials in each step of the conduct of an election. • be within a reasonable distance to read documents, writings, or electronic screens and reasonable proximity to hear election-related discussion between election judges and electors. • observe a drop box or any steps with confidential or personally identifiable information – **only if the watcher is in possession of an approved watcher training certificate** (and, at VSPC and central count facilities, wearing a gold watcher badge).	• abuse, threaten, or intimidate election officials or voters. • interfere with the orderly conduct of any election process. • interrupt or disrupt the processing, verification, and counting of any ballots or any other election stage. • write down any ballot numbers or any other personally identifying information about the electors. • touch or handle VSPC Combo Forms, ballots, mail ballot envelopes, voting or counting machines, or machine components. • observe steps with confidential or personally identifiable information **until/unless** they have completed the required training **and** present the training certificate. • communicate with election judges about that judge's duties while that

[27] Section 1-7-108, C.R.S. and Colorado Election Rules 8.10.2, 8.11, and 8.12.
[28] Colorado Election Rules 8.7.4, 8.13, and 8.14.

Watchers **may:**[27]	Watchers may **not:**[28]
• leave a location and return without presenting another certificate of appointment. • possess a mobile phone to send or receive text messages while watching election activities – as long as the watcher is **not** located where confidential or personally identifiable information is within view. • request and receive a list of all voters who have cast a ballot in the county; this list is updated daily during an active election at DenverVotes.org. • track the names of electors who have cast ballots and challenge electors under Section 1-9-203, C.R.S. and Rule 9, and submit written complaints in accordance with Section 1-1.5-105, C.R.S and Rule 13. • alert the designated watcher contact if they dispute a decision by an election judge or if they allege a discrepancy. • assist in the correction of discrepancies. • observe drop boxes from a six-foot distance, if appointed to observe drop boxes.	judge is on duty, unless the judge is the designated watcher contact. • use any device to make or receive an audio, photographic, or video communication or recording in any place election activities are conducted, including while observing a drop box. • openly and visibly possess an electronic device while watching election activities where confidential or personally identifiable information is within view. • be within the immediate voting area while an elector is voting. • attempt to determine how any elector voted or dissuade a voter from returning a ballot, or multiple ballots, to a drop box. • refuse or fail to wear an approved badge identifying themselves as a watcher. • disclose or record any confidential voter information. • disclose any results before the polls have closed. • commit or encourage fraud in connection with their duties. • transfer a certificate of appointment to anyone else. • violate the watcher oath.

Removal of Watchers[29]

The Denver Clerk & Recorder may remove a watcher upon finding that the watcher violated any Colorado election law or rule.

The Denver Clerk & Recorder will inform the appointing authority upon removal of a watcher. The removed watcher may be replaced by a duly certified alternate.

Contact Information and References

Appointing authorities and watchers with questions can contact the Denver Clerk & Recorder's Election Call Center at 720-913-VOTE (8683) or email the team at elections@denvergov.org.

The Denver Clerk & Recorder building is located at 200 W. 14th Ave, Denver, 80204.

Helpful websites:

- Denver Clerk & Recorder – Elections Division
    - Visit the Campaign & Candidate Resources page for the Watcher Submission Form and a digital version of this guide.
    - Visit the Election Data & Maps page for current and historical election data, maps, etc.
- Colorado Revised Statutes
- Colorado Secretary of State – Elections Division
- Colorado Secretary of State's Election Rules
- Colorado Secretary of State – Election Watcher Training Course

[29] Colorado Election Rules 8.6 and 8.14.