



City of Whittier – General Municipal Election Election Observer Guide 2026

Guide based on California Secretary of State guidance on election observer rights and responsibilities.

Purpose: Election observers help ensure transparency by observing election processes without interfering with voters or election officials. California law allows observation but strictly limits conduct that could disrupt voting, interfere with the orderly progression of election processes, or intimidate voters. In particular, Elections Code §18502 prohibits any person from interfering with or obstructing election officials in the performance of their duties, including delaying or preventing election work. This ensures that while observation is permitted, the election process must proceed without disruption. This guide is provided as general information and is not meant to replace or provide legal advice, or to constitute the totality of laws governed by the California Elections Code, Code of Regulations, Government Code, and California case law. It is the responsibility of the observer to obtain the most up-to-date information reflecting changes in law or procedures.

California Administrative Code §20874 provides that the Election Official may determine the distance at which observers may observe; observers who do not materially comply with the provisions of this section and guide may be removed from the voting area to prevent interference with the conduct of voting and election processes following a verbal warning by the Precinct Inspector or Election Official.

What Election Observers CAN Do

- Observe vote-by-mail ballot processing and central counting activities. (§15104)
- Observe polling place procedures before opening, during voting, and after closing including the semifinal official results, official canvass, one percent manual tally, audit, and certification of the election.
- Observe ballot drop box retrieval and ballot transport procedures where permitted by the elections official..
- Inspect publicly available voter roster information without disrupting voting (Elections Code §14223). Taking photos or videos of roster signatures is prohibited by law (§ 2194).
- Observe the tabulation of ballots at the central count location at City Hall Council Chamber

- View Provisional Ballot Processing during the official canvass.
- Observe conditional voter registration processing where permitted.
- Observe the duplication of ballots that are damaged or have distinguishing marks pursuant to §14287
- Take notes and provide voter challenges with the Election Official. A voter challenge does not stop the processing of the election activity.
- Report concerns to the precinct inspector or City Elections Official at (562) 567-9855.
- Request from the City Clerk a Voting Street Index
- Observers in the Election Center must sign in when they enter the room, please contact the City Clerk Department at (562)567-9850 for the time signatures checking/VBM processing will occur for a given day.
- Challenge of Vote-by-mail ballots pursuant to §15105 and 15106.
- Conduct exit polling (with the consent of the voter) at least 25 feet away from voting locations, or ballot drop boxes (§20878(a)(8)).

What Poll Watchers CANNOT Do

- Interfere in any way with the election, canvass, or a voter casting a ballot (§18502).
- Intimidate Poll Workers.
- Communicate with Poll Workers when engaged with a voter.
- Question voters about citizenship, residency, or eligibility.
- Directly challenge a voter's qualifications to vote (§14240).
- Enter voting booth areas (§14221).
- Handle ballots, envelopes, rosters, or voting equipment.
- Sit at the Poll Workers Table or stand behind them (§ 14223).
- Disrupt voting, counting, or election worker duties.
- Use phones or cameras in a way that would violate (§ 2302), which includes prohibits entering restricted voting areas, interfering with election officials or the voting process, handling ballots or equipment without authorization, disclosing or attempting to determine how someone voted, and engaging in intimidation, coercion, or electioneering near polling places..
- Attempt to determine how someone voted or violate ballot secrecy.
- Intimidate, threaten, follow, or block voters (§18540).
- Electioneer or influence voters within 100 feet of the entrance where voting takes place (§18541).
- Challenge an Election Official's determination that a signature on a mail ballot envelope compares to a signature in the voter's registration record (§15107).
- Any use of force, violence, coercion or intimidation to compel a person to vote or refrain from voting in any election (§ 18540).

Best Practices

- Introduce yourself to the precinct inspector upon arrival.
- Follow all site rules established by City Elections Official.
- Remain calm, professional, and neutral.
- Record observations with times and locations.
- Report concerns through election officials rather than confronting voters.