



★ VIRGINIA ★  
DEPARTMENT *of* ELECTIONS

# How to Run for Local Office

Ballot Access Requirements for  
the **March 3, 2020 Primary** and  
the **May 5, 2020 General Elections**

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## Definitions and Key Icons

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**Political party** – an organization that, at either of the two preceding statewide general elections, received at least 10 percent of the total vote cast for any statewide office filled in that election (currently only Democratic and Republican)

**Primary candidate** – an individual who is seeking the nomination of a political party by running in a primary

**Non-primary party candidate** – an individual who is seeking the nomination of a political party by a means other than a primary; speak with the party

**Independent** – an individual who is seeking to run in a General Election without the nomination from the Republican or Democratic party (may include a recognized party or no party)

**Incumbent** – an officeholder who wants to run for reelection to the same office

**Qualified voter** – a person who is entitled to vote under the Virginia Constitution and is properly registered to vote (see [definition here](#))

**Va. Code** – Virginia Code

**VAC** – Virginia Administrative Code

**Writ of election** – a legal document issued by a judge ordering an election

**COMET** – Database for candidates to file, and the Department of Elections to track, campaign finance

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- Notes where to find information in the Code of Virginia or Virginia Administrative Code.



- Indicates beginning and/or ending deadlines for filing documents.



- Indicates information on where to file documents.



- Indicates additional information that may be helpful.

# How candidates get on the ballot in Virginia

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**Follow these instructions if you are running for one of these local offices:**

## Local Offices

|                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Mayor, City               | Mayor, Town           |
| Member, City Council      | Member, Town Council  |
| Member, City School Board | Town Recorder (Clerk) |

**Follow these instructions to get on the ballot for:**

- The Primary Election on Tuesday, March 3, 2020.
- The General Election on Tuesday, May 5, 2020.

## Election Calendar 2020

| Type of Election   | Candidates: Last Day to File             |
|--|--|
| <b>Primary</b>   |  |
| Tuesday, March 3, 2020   | Thursday, December 19, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. |
| Find in Code: Va. Code §§ <a href="#">24.2-503</a> , <a href="#">24.2-522</a> and <a href="#">24.2-524</a> |  |
| <b>General</b>   |  |
| Tuesday, May 5, 2020   | Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.      |
| Find in Code: Va. Code §§ <a href="#">24.2-503</a> and <a href="#">24.2-507</a>                            |  |

## Do you fulfill the basic qualifications to be a candidate?

- You have been a resident of Virginia for one year immediately preceding the election.
- You are a resident of the city or town in which you are trying to run for office.
- You are registered to vote in the city or town in which you are trying to run for office.

# What, when, and where do I file?

[This table is a summary. Find more information below.](#)

|           | What do I need to file?  | Notes or other information   | Where do I file this form?  | When does filing open?   | What is the deadline to file?            |
|-----------|--|--|---|--|--|
| <b>1</b>  | <a href="#">Certificate of Candidate Qualification – Local Office</a><br><br>§§ <a href="#">24.2-501</a> or <a href="#">24.2-503</a>                             |  | Your general registrar  | Primary candidates:<br>After primary method is adopted by the local political party committee. | Thursday, December 19, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. |
|           |  |  | May be sent postmarked by deadline if sent registered or certified USPS mail. | Non-primary party and independent candidates:<br>Thursday, January 2, 2020.                    | Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.      |
| <b>2</b>  | <a href="#">Statement of Economic Interest – Local Office</a><br><br>§§ <a href="#">24.2-502</a> and <a href="#">24.2-503</a>                                    | Only applies to certain candidates (review page 8).  | Your general registrar  | Primary candidates:<br>After primary method is adopted by the local political party committee. | Thursday, December 19, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. |
|           |  |  | May be sent postmarked by deadline if sent registered or certified USPS mail. | Non-primary party and independent candidates:<br>Thursday, January 2, 2020.                    | Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.      |
| <b>3</b>  | <a href="#">Primary Filing Fee</a><br><br>§§ <a href="#">24.2-523</a> and <a href="#">24.2-524</a>   |  | With the Treasurer or Director of Finance in the locality where you live.     | Primary candidates:<br>After primary method is adopted by the local political party committee. | Thursday, December 19, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. |
|           |  |  |   | Non-primary party and independent candidates:<br>You do not need to file.                      |  |
| <b>4a</b> | <a href="#">Declaration of Candidacy</a><br><br>§§ <a href="#">24.2-505</a> , <a href="#">24.2-507</a> , <a href="#">24.2-520</a> , and <a href="#">24.2-522</a> | Submit with the Petitions of Qualified Voters (4c) and, if applicable, the receipt for your primary filing fee (4b). | Primary candidates: With the Chairman of your local political party.          | Primary candidates:<br>Monday, December 2, 2019 at noon.                                       | Thursday, December 19, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. |
|           |  |  | All other candidates: With the General Registrar of your locality.            | Independent candidates:<br>Thursday, January 2, 2020   | Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.      |



## Follow these steps to file your candidacy:

- 1 Fill out and submit the [Certificate of Candidate Qualification Form – Local Offices \(SBE-501\)](#).



Find in Virginia Code §§ [24.2-501](#) or [24.2-503](#).



### Primary candidates

File starting **after primary method of nomination is adopted by the local political party committee.**

File ending **December 19, 2019 at 5 pm.**

### Non-primary party and independent candidates

File starting **January 2, 2020.**

File ending **March 3, 2020 at 7 pm.**

All candidates can mail this form by the deadline and the general registrar will accept it. You must:

- Pay the postage and send by registered or certified mail.
- Keep the receipt in case the general registrar asks for proof that you mailed this form before the deadline.



Submit this form to your general registrar.



After you submit this form:

- The general registrar puts your information into the Virginia Election and Registration Information System (VERIS).
- The Department of Elections posts your contact information on the Department website.

## 2 Fill out and submit the [Statement of Economic Interests](#) (if required).



Find in Virginia Code §§ [24.2-502](#) and [24.2-503](#).

Required of a candidate running for constitutional office OR a candidate running for a seat on a governing body or elected school board of any county, city, or town with a population in excess of 3,500 persons.



### Primary candidates

File starting **after primary method of nomination is adopted by the local political party committee.**

File ending **December 19, 2019 at 5 pm.**

### Non-primary party and independent candidates

File starting **January 2, 2020.**

File ending **March 3, 2020 at 7 pm.**

All candidates can mail this form by the deadline and we will accept it. You must:

- Pay the postage and send by registered or certified mail.
- Keep the receipt in case we ask for proof that you mailed this form before the deadline.



Submit this form to your general registrar.



An incumbent seeking re-election who filed the Statement of Economic Interest pursuant to § [2.2-3115](#), i.e. annual filing, is not required to file another Statement of Economic Interest as a candidate. This also applies to an interim appointee who is seeking election to his/her appointed office.

If you need help with this form, contact the [Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council](#).

- Email: [ethics@dls.virginia.gov](mailto:ethics@dls.virginia.gov)
- Phone number: 804-698-1848

### 3 Submit Primary Filing fee and receipt.



Find in Virginia Code §§ [24.2-523](#) and [24.2-524](#).



Submit payment starting **after primary method of nomination is adopted by the local political party committee.**

Submit payment before **December 19, 2020 at 5 pm.**

Submit Primary Filing Fee Receipt, Declaration of Candidacy form, and petition signatures together.

Non-primary party and independent candidates do not need to pay filing fee.



Submit your payment to the Treasurer or Director of Finance in the locality where you live.



Keep the receipt for your payment. You will need to submit this with your Declaration of Candidacy and petition signatures.

What happens to my primary filing fee if I get disqualified, run unopposed, or withdraw?

**If you get disqualified or run unopposed in the primary**, you will get a refund for the primary filing fee.

**If you withdraw** you can get a refund if the general registrar receives your withdrawal notice before the party chair files the Certification of Qualified Primary Candidates form. The deadline for party chairs to file is December 24, 2019, but the party may file sooner.



**4a;** Fill out and submit a [Declaration of Candidacy](#) form (SBE-505/520).  
**4b**



Find in Virginia Code §§ [24.2-505](#), [24.2-507](#), [24.2-520](#), and [24.2-522](#).



### Primary candidates

File starting **December 2, 2019 at noon.**

File ending **December 19, 2019 at 5 pm.**

### Independent candidates

File starting **January 2, 2020.**

File ending **March 3, 2020 at 7 pm.**

Your general registrar must **receive** this form by the deadline listed above. A postmark or other mailing service timestamp does not qualify.



Submit this form along with:

- the Petitions of Qualified Voters **AND**
  - the Primary filing receipt (if required)
- to
- Primary candidates: Chairman of your local political party
  - All other candidates: your general registrar.



If you are a party candidate nominated by a method other than a primary, then you do not need to submit a Declaration of Candidacy unless required by your party.

**4c** Collect petition signatures and submit the [Petitions of Qualified Voters](#) (SBE-506/521).



Find in Virginia Code §§ [24.2-505\(D\)](#), [24.2-506](#), [24.2-507](#), [24.2-521](#), and [24.2-522](#).

Find in [1 VAC 20-50-20](#) and [1 VAC 20-50-30](#).

- Check local charters for additional or different requirements.
- Contact the local attorney for guidance.

|   | Primary Candidates   | Non-primary party candidates                | Independent Candidates   |
|---|--|---|--|
|    | <p>Collect signatures:<br/>Check with local party chair to see if the party has adopted the primary as its method of nomination (<a href="#">Democrat</a> – <a href="#">Republican</a>).</p> <p>File starting:<br/>December 2, 2019 at 12 pm.</p> <p>File ending:<br/>December 19, 2019 at 5 pm.</p> | <p>You do not need to submit this form.</p> | <p>Collect signatures:<br/>January 2, 2020, – March 3, 2020</p> <p>File starting:<br/>January 2, 2020</p> <p>File ending:<br/>March 3, 2020 at 7 pm.</p> |
|  | <p>Submit this form to the Chairman of your local political party.</p>   |   | <p>File this form with your general registrar.</p>   |



The first time you file petition pages, the pages must be filed along with the Declaration of Candidacy and receipt for Primary Filing fee (if required).

Candidates running for the general election may file petition pages more than once. See the table on page 12 for the number of signatures needed.

Independent candidates will appear on the ballot in the order of time of filing for the office - the time at which the independent candidate files the required number of petition signatures. If no petition is required, the time of filing will be when the candidate files a completed statement of qualification.

At the time of filing you can request notification of any problems that can be corrected before the filing deadline. Make this request in writing and address it to the Secretary of the local electoral board.

They will try to get back to you but cannot guarantee a timely response.

If you do not qualify as a candidate because you did not have enough signatures, then you can submit an appeal to the local electoral board regarding the petition signatures.

Submit your appeal **within 5 days** from when the disqualification notice was issued. You will need to prove that you have the correct number of signatures from qualified voters before the deadline.

Find more information in [1 VAC 20-50-30](#).

### Things to remember about petitions:

Petition Pages must...

- be on the form from the Department of Elections, and you cannot alter it in any way
- be either letter or legal size. Both are available on the [Department of Elections website](#).
- be one page printed on the front and back. You can make as many copies as you need.
- contain the signature, printed full name, and full residence address of each qualified voter and the date the voter signed. The last four (4) digits of the qualified voter's Social Security number are helpful, but not required.

The petition circulator...

- must be a legal resident of the United States and must sign the affidavit for each page in front of a notary.
- cannot be a minor.
- can be an individual who was convicted of a felony only if his/her voting rights are restored.
- cannot be the circulator of the page on which they sign the petition.

When collecting your petition signatures, it is helpful to remember that...

- Because people who are not registered to vote often sign petitions for candidates, we recommended that you collect at least 1 ½ times the number of signatures required.
- [1VAC20-50-20](#) lists material omissions for petition signatures and pages. If your petition has a material omission, it may render the page or signature invalid.

## Petition Signature Requirements

| <b>Office you seek</b>   | <b>Size of locality<br/>(if relevant)</b>                               | <b>Number of petition<br/>signatures you need<br/>from qualified voters</b> |
|--|---|---|
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | Any county or city  | 125 signatures  |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | An election district, not at large, with 1000 or less registered voters | 50 signatures   |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | Any town with more than 3,500 registered voters.                        | 125 signatures  |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | A ward or other district not at large.                                  | 25 signatures   |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | Any town with 1,500 – 3,500 registered voters.                          | 50 signatures   |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | Any town with 1,500 – 3,500 registered voters.                          | 50 signatures   |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | Any ward or other district not at large.                                | 25 signatures   |
| Membership on the governing body or elected school board of... | Any town with less than 1,500 registered voters.                        | No signatures required  |
| All other candidates   |   | 50 signatures   |

## Can I withdraw my candidacy?



Find in Virginia Code § [24.2-612.2](#). ELECT offers [ELECT-612.2](#) to help facilitate the candidate withdrawal process.



A withdrawing candidate should submit his/her withdrawal notice with enough time before absentee voting commences in order to ensure his/her name is removed from the ballot.

If you submit your form after your local ballots are printed, your name will not be removed from the ballot, but you will no longer be a candidate.



Submit your written withdrawal to your [General Registrar](#). Electronic submissions of signed withdrawal notices are permissible.



To be withdrawn from the ballot you must submit a signed written notice declaring your intent to withdraw from the election.

The next two requirements relate to Campaign Finance accounts and reporting.

## 5 Fill out and submit [Statement of Organization for a Candidate](#).



Find in Virginia Code Title 24.2 [Chapter 9.3](#).



Within 10 days of one of the following:

- you accept a contribution.
- you spend any funds.
- you pay a filing fee.
- you file a Certificate of Candidate Qualification.
- you appoint a campaign treasurer, campaign committee, or campaign depository.



Submit copies to:

- [With the Department of Elections according to the instructions in COMET](#).
- [the General Registrar in the locality where you live after filing with the Department of Elections](#).



If you do not submit this form, you may have to pay penalties.

Learn about the [Campaign Finance Disclosure Act](#).

## 6 Submit Campaign Finance Reports



Find in Virginia Code Title 24.2 [Chapter 9.3](#).



For candidate committees active in 2019, submit reports according to the appropriate [2019 reporting schedule](#). Candidate committees active in 2020, submit reports according to the appropriate [2020 reporting schedule](#).



Submit copies to:

- [Department of Elections through COMET](#)
- OR to your general registrar by paper for localities with populations fewer than 70,000.

## Qualified Independent Candidate that Wishes to Reflect Nomination by a Third Party.



Find in Virginia Code § [24.2-613](#). Party ID does not appear on the ballot for local office elections. The nomination by a third party will provide the candidate with his/her party’s ballot position placement as determined by the State Board of Elections (see § 24.2-613(C)).



File starting **January 2, 2020**.  
File ending **June 15, 2020 at 11:59 pm**.

Use this table to learn what, when, and where to file.

|    | What do I need to file?  | Where do I file this letter?      | When does filing open?     | What is the deadline to file?      |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. | <p>A letter signed by the State Chair stating the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group has been in existence for at least six months prior to the filing of its nominee.</li> <li>The group has a state central committee composed of registered voters from each of Virginia’s 11 congressional districts in continual existence for the six months prior to the filing of its nominee.</li> <li>The group has a party plan and bylaws.</li> </ul> | With the Department of Elections. | Thursday, January 2, 2020. | Monday, June 15, 2020 at 11:59 pm. |
| 2. | <p>A letter signed by the State Chair and signed by the candidate stating the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Chair certifies the candidate is the nominee of the party.</li> <li>The candidate accepts the nomination of the party.</li> </ul>  | With the Department of Elections. | Thursday, January 2, 2020. | Monday, June 15, 2020 at 11:59 pm. |



Submit these letters to the Department of Elections. Electronic submission of these letters is permissible ([ea@elections.virginia.gov](mailto:ea@elections.virginia.gov)).



The Department of Elections recommends that the Independent candidate provide this information to the State Chair of his/her party. This presumably will assure that the party will provide the nominee with what s/he needs to file with the Department of Elections.

### General Disclaimer

The electronic version of this Candidate Bulletin can be found on the Department of Elections website:

<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/candidatepac-info/candidate-bulletins/index.html>

Candidates are responsible for complying with all current applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.

This Candidate Bulletin provides an overview of Virginia electoral requirements only. It does not purport to provide legal advice or binding statements of official policy. Rather, the Candidate Bulletin describes election law found in the Code of Virginia. Applicable laws and regulations are subject to change in content and interpretation.