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Maryland State Board of Elections Administrator Jared DeMarinis Issues Statement on Recruiting and Assigning Election Judges

ANNAPOLIS (October 2, 2024) — 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. And State employees are permitted administrative leave to serve as an election judge during hours they would otherwise have to work. The reason for the expansion of election judge recruitment was simple. We need individuals to serve.

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 in 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. And they know how to facilitate the observation of electoral activities by challengers and watchers to ensure our elections meet the utmost standard for integrity and transparency. 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.*

Election Judges are appointed 13 weeks prior to the Primary Election and continue to serve throughout the 13 weeks prior to the next Statewide Primary Election. It is a 2-year commitment. Training and recruitment is an ongoing process by the local boards of elections. There are never enough election judges on call to serve. Individuals get sick, have emergencies, have transportation issues, and a whole list of other things that might prevent them from serving on an assigned day. Having election judges assigned to being on call is the only way to mitigate this problem and ensure smooth election operations. An Election Director must balance operational needs with the realities of managing an enormous, temporary workforce when assigning election judges to positions and locations. Electoral operations rely on the expertise of our Election Directors understanding their jurisdictions, the needs of each individual polling place in them, and the trained judges they have available to them. An Election Director's authority to deploy election judges and voting equipment for an election is one of the foundations of a smooth election operation.

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 or disenfranchise a voter. And to say otherwise is disingenuous. Any complaints about an election judge regarding their fitness, qualifications, or performance, should be reported immediately to the local board of elections, which has the

authority to investigate and remove that election judge.

Finally, I want to address the role of law enforcement at polling places. The Sheriff's office does not have any legal authority to conduct security checks or a role in securing the ballots in a polling place. Nor does the Sheriff enforce the requirements of the Election Law Article. The legal authority to keep the peace, to preserve the integrity of the voting process and maintain order in the polling place is entrusted to the election judge. In fact, a police officer must obey the order of the election judge at the polling place.

Marylanders can feel safe, secure and confident that their ballot will be counted and determinative for the election. As the trusted source of information for the electoral process, Marylanders should be confident in our compliance with the law and the conduct of the election.

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