



Wesley Wilcox

Supervisor of Elections, Marion County, FL

Election Center

981 NE 16th ST • Ocala, FL 34470

M PO Box 289 • Ocala, FL 34478-0289

P 352-620-3290

F 352-620-3286

W www.VoteMarion.Gov

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Sewell, and Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Wesley Wilcox, and I serve as the Supervisor of Elections for Marion County, Florida. I am a Past President of the Florida Supervisors of Elections Association and currently serve on multiple national election administration boards. Over the course of nearly four decades administering elections, I have worked through presidential elections, recounts, hurricanes, and significant changes to election law. During those years, I've watched the role of poll watchers evolve dramatically. From where I sit, that's been one of the biggest changes in election administration. I believe that evolution has strengthened both election administration and public confidence.

When I first entered this profession, poll watchers primarily served as representatives of political parties who tracked voter turnout. Their role was largely limited to observing who had voted so campaigns could encourage supporters who had not yet cast a ballot.

Florida learned a great deal following the 2000 election, and I think many of those lessons have benefited election administration across the country. One of the biggest lessons was that election observation works best when it operates within a clear, professional framework. Florida adopted rules governing poll watcher credentials, permitted activities, and interactions with election workers. These standards were designed to accomplish two equally important goals: allowing meaningful observation while ensuring election operations remained orderly, secure, and free from interference.

Since 2020, public interest in election administration has grown dramatically. Prior to that election, Marion County typically credentialed approximately 50 poll watchers. In 2020, that number grew to just over 200. By 2022, it exceeded 500. During our last countywide general election in 2024, we credentialed more than 1,200 poll watchers.

Rather than viewing this increased interest as a challenge, I believe election administrators should view it as an opportunity.

As election administrators, we advertise dozens of public meetings every election cycle. Whether it's Logic and Accuracy testing, Canvassing Board meetings, or other public election activities, there is often little public interest. Most of us are lucky to have two or three citizens attend, but most of these meetings have no public attendance at all. Today, I have more than 1,200 citizens who voluntarily signed up to observe elections. We need to embrace that level of interest because, to me, that's an opportunity we shouldn't miss.

I believe properly trained poll watchers are partners in transparency. When observers understand their role, follow established rules, and work professionally alongside election officials, they help strengthen public confidence while allowing election administrators to demonstrate the safeguards already built into our system.

Successful election observation depends on professionalism. Clear expectations, proper credentials, thorough training, and mutual respect between election officials and observers allow transparency and orderly election administration to go hand in hand. Well-trained observers understand that their responsibility is to observe—not interfere with—the voting process, respect voter privacy, and follow the direction of election officials.

In Florida, poll watchers have the opportunity to observe numerous safeguards that many voters never see. They witness voter identification requirements, signature verification for vote-by-mail ballots, the use of provisional ballots when appropriate, and the procedures governing unused and surrendered vote-by-mail ballots.

We have a perfect opportunity to counter many of the false narratives that circulate online. We can educate people about how elections actually work. We can show how photo and signature ID are verified in Florida. We can show how provisional ballots are used. We can show how vote-by-mail ballots are processed and safeguarded.

Most importantly, by allowing people to see the process for themselves, we can demonstrate, not simply tell them, how our election system works. They see firsthand how our systems help ensure that only eligible citizens cast ballots, that identity is verified as required by law, and that secure voter registration databases help ensure each qualified voter votes only once.

Every observer who leaves with a better understanding of these processes becomes an informed voice within his or her own community. That education extends well beyond Election Day and helps strengthen confidence among voters who may never have the opportunity to observe the process themselves.

I believe the more people understand how elections are administered, the more confidence they'll have in the process. We have an opportunity to show people, not just tell them, how elections work. That's good for voters, it's good for election administrators, and ultimately, it's good for our country.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.