

Frequently Asked Questions About Cost Certification: Uniform Polling Hours*

* See [Massachusetts Acts of 1983, c. 503 \(Uniform Polling Hours Law\)](#).

PLEASE BE ADVISED that DLM is responsible solely for certifying costs and does not handle the disbursement of funds. **Certification does not guarantee funding.** Municipalities are urged to exercise fiscal responsibility and proactively manage the incurrence of costs. DLM may ask for additional information and supporting documentation in connection with any estimated expenses submitted for certification.

Q1 When you refer to “Uniform Polling Hours,” what do you mean?

The Uniform Polling Hours Law increased the number of hours that polls are required to be open for presidential and state primaries and general elections from ten hours to thirteen hours. “Uniform Polling Hours” refers to the *required additional three hours of polling operations at the beginning of election day* for each presidential and state primary and general election, as applicable for a given fiscal year.

Q2 Do I need to fill out a cost certification survey?

Yes! Each municipality must submit a response to each Uniform Polling Hours cost certification survey. The Office of the State Auditor’s Division of Local Mandates (DLM) conducts a thorough certification process for all 351 municipalities to make sure an accurate accounting of estimated expenses is submitted to the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Even if your municipality will not incur costs beyond incidental expenses, you must still submit a survey response; the survey will automatically advance past inapplicable questions based on your responses.

Q3 How do I complete the cost certification survey?

Survey responses must be submitted directly in the web browser; we ask that you do not print the survey to submit by postal or electronic mail. A link to the survey is emailed to clerks upon survey launch, and active surveys are also available on our website: <https://www.mass.gov/uniform-polling-hours-cost-certifications>. DLM continues to pursue implementation of a new portal for future surveys; more information to come at a future date.

Q4 What elections will be covered by upcoming Uniform Polling Hours cost certification surveys; when will the surveys open and when will responses be due?

Covered Elections	Survey Launch Date	Deadline for Survey Submission <u>by</u> Municipalities to DLM
FY 2027: September 2026 state primary November 2026 general election	June 11, 2025	July 2, 2025
FY 2028: March 2028 presidential primary	April 2026 (estimated)	3 weeks after survey launch
FY 2029: September 2028 state primary November 2028 general election	April 2027 (estimated)	3 weeks after survey launch

DLM may provide certification totals to the Secretary on a rolling basis.

Q5 Should I submit two separate surveys for the September state primary and November general election?

No. Submit only one survey response after the November general election for Uniform Polling Hours estimated expenses for both the September state primary and the November general election.

Please do not enter early voting expenses in the Uniform Polling Hours survey.

Q6 Should I submit estimated expenses for the March presidential primary in the same survey as that year's September state primary and November general election?

No. Estimated expenses for a March presidential primary must be submitted in a separate Uniform Polling Hours survey because the March presidential primary occurs in a different fiscal year than the September state primary and November general election. The Uniform Polling Hours Law directs the State Auditor to determine and deliver to the Secretary of the Commonwealth *each year* a statement of the incremental costs attributed to the Uniform Polling Hours Law and estimated to be incurred by each city and town in the *next* fiscal year.

Please do not enter early voting expenses in the Uniform Polling Hours survey.

Q7 Can I edit my municipality's Uniform Polling Hours submission?

Please make every effort to ensure the accuracy of your submission. If you find an error, immediately email DLM.CostCertification@massauditor.gov for assistance. Changes may only be initiated by municipalities until DLM reports final certifications to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, **which may occur on a rolling basis** with each survey. Therefore, we strongly encourage municipalities to submit according to DLM **survey deadlines** and ensure accuracy at the time of submission.

Q8 When will my municipality receive funding, and where will the funds be deposited?

DLM certifies costs to the Secretary of the Commonwealth and does not handle the disbursement of funds. The Secretary's Elections Division encumbers the monies in the Massachusetts Management Accounting and Reporting System (MMARS), where payment is then processed for each city and town. After approval, the Treasurer's office sends the monies to the fund each municipality has set up with the Comptroller's office in MMARS. For any direct questions about the distribution of these funds, please contact the Elections Division via email at elections@sec.state.ma.us, or by phone at 1-800-462-VOTE (8683).

FAQs as of June 9, 2025, and subject to change. For general informational purposes only; these FAQs do not constitute legal or other professional advice.

Q9 How must Uniform Polling Hours funds be accounted for and how may they be spent?

Uniform Polling Hours funds are disbursed by the Secretary of the Commonwealth prior to elections and must be spent on election expenses. The funds may be deposited into a special revenue fund and expended without further appropriation by a municipality. For any direct questions about accounting for these funds, please contact your Bureau of Accounts Field Representative. Contact information is available at <https://www.mass.gov/guides/dls-staff-directory#-bureau-of-accounts->.

Q10 What Uniform Polling Hours expenses will be certified by DLM?

Pursuant to the Uniform Polling Hours Law, DLM will certify the *incremental* costs attributable to the Uniform Polling Hours Law estimated to be incurred by each city and town in the next fiscal year. In other words, DLM will certify the estimated *additional or increased* costs attributable to the *first three hours* of polling operations for each presidential and state primary and general election, as applicable for a given fiscal year. DLM will not certify costs that will be incurred regardless of the required additional first three hours of polling operations. See questions and examples below.

Survey respondents (e.g., clerks) are required to sign a clause confirming that the information provided in the survey for their municipality is true and accurate to the best of their knowledge and that estimates have been made in good faith.

Please do not enter early voting expenses in the Uniform Polling Hours survey.

Q11 My municipality will need to hire hourly temporary election workers for the first three hours of polling operations. Should I include their estimated pay?

Yes. Estimated compensation for hourly temporary election workers who will be hired specifically to work the first three hours of polling operations would be an additional expense incurred due to the Uniform Polling Hours Law and may be submitted for certification. The estimated compensation must be for workers and work essential to polling operations and estimates must be made in good faith.

Q12 Can my municipality submit estimated costs for regular employees' compensation if they will be working the first three hours of polling operations?

Estimated compensation for regular employees of your municipality who will be working the first three hours of polling operations may only be submitted for certification if the compensation will be an *additional or increased* expense for your municipality. In other words, estimated compensation for a regular employee who will be working the first three hours of polling operations may be submitted for certification **if**:

1. working the first three hours of polling operations will cause the employee to work more than the employee's regular number of hours during the applicable pay period, **and**
2. the estimated compensation for those hours will cause the employee to receive more from your municipality than the employee's regular amount of compensation for the applicable pay period, e.g., overtime, **and**
3. **only** to the extent of the addition or increase.

You should not submit estimated compensation expenses or hours for employees who will be working their regular number of hours or regular shift, or who will be working excess hours but receiving their regular compensation, *even if* they are anticipated to be working the first three hours of polling operations. Shifting regular employees' hours to cover the first three hours of polling operations will not in and of itself result in additional or increased expenses.

With respect to *salaried employees*, additional estimated compensation for Uniform Polling Hours will generally **not** be certified as salaried employees typically receive the same compensation regardless of hours worked. DLM may certify in limited instances, e.g. where there is an agreement granting additional compensation to a salaried employee for the first three hours of polling operations.

Q13 I will have police officers and/or constables working the first three hours of polling operations – will estimated expenses for their hours be certified?

DLM will consider estimated compensation for police officers or constables working the first three hours of polling operations if the compensation will be an *additional or increased* expense for your municipality.

In other words, estimated compensation for officers or constables who will be hired specifically to work the first three hours of polling operations (i.e., officers or constables who **are not** regular employees of your municipality) would be an additional expense incurred due to the Uniform Polling Hours Law and may be submitted for certification.

Estimated compensation for officers or constables who **are** regular employees of your municipality and who will be working the first three hours of polling operations may be submitted for certification **if**:

1. working the first three hours of polling operations will cause the officer or constable to work more than the officer's or constable's regular number of hours during the applicable pay period, **and**
2. the estimated compensation for those hours will cause the officer or constable to receive more from your municipality than the officer's or constable's regular amount of compensation for the applicable pay period, e.g., overtime or detail pay, **and**
3. **only** to the extent of the addition or increase.

You should not submit estimated compensation expenses or hours for officers or constables who will be working their regular number of hours or regular shift, or who will be working excess hours but receiving their regular compensation, *even if* they are anticipated to be working the first three hours of polling operations. Shifting officers' or constables' hours to cover the first three hours of polling operations will not in and of itself result in additional or increased expenses.

Please note that M.G.L. c. 54, s. 72, provides that the "select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council of each city and town, in consultation with its election officers and registrars, shall detail a sufficient number of police officers or constables for each building that contains the polling place for 1 or more precincts at every election therein to preserve

order and to protect the election officers and supervisors from any interference with their duties and to aid in enforcing the laws relating to elections.” If estimated compensation for more than one officer or constable per polling location for the first three hours of polling operations is submitted, DLM may require supporting documentation of the rationale for why more than one officer or constable is necessary “to preserve order and to protect the election officers and supervisors from any interference with their duties and to aid in enforcing the laws relating to elections.” Estimates must be made in good faith.

Q14 Will costs for setting up polling locations be certified?

Generally, estimated expenses for polling location set-up will be incurred by a municipality regardless of the Uniform Polling Hours Law. DLM will certify location set-up costs where additional or increased costs can be specifically attributed to the required additional first three hours of polling operations.

Q15 My municipality will have rental expenses for polling locations – will the rental expense be certified?

Generally, rental expenses will be incurred by a municipality regardless of the Uniform Polling Hours Law and rental agreements typically cover timeframes that will already include the additional hours attributable to the Uniform Polling Hours Law. The expense of a rental agreement at a daily, weekly, or monthly rate will be incurred regardless of the additional hours attributable to the Uniform Polling Hours Law. DLM will certify rental costs where additional or increased costs can be specifically attributed to the required additional first three hours of polling operations.