

# 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 ([Massachusetts Acts of 1983, c. 503](#)) increased the number of hours that polls are required to be open for presidential primaries, state primaries, and general elections from ten hours beginning at 10 a.m. to thirteen hours beginning at 7 a.m. “Uniform Polling Hours” refer to the additional three hours of polling operations between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. The Office of the State Auditor manages a certification process for “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” for each presidential primary, state primary, and general election.

## Q2 What Uniform Polling Hours expenses will be certified by DLM?

In accordance with the Uniform Polling Hours Law, the Office of the State Auditor’s Division of Local Mandates (DLM) will certify the ***estimated additional or increased expenses*** attributable to Uniform Polling Hours for a given fiscal year. In other words, Uniform Polling Hours estimated expenses may be attributable to the additional three hours of polling operations between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. or the required earlier opening of the polls at 7 a.m. *only to the extent expenses would not otherwise be incurred.*

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.

### **Q3 Do I need to fill out a Uniform Polling Hours cost certification survey?**

***Yes! Each municipality must submit a response to each Uniform Polling Hours cost certification survey.*** The Uniform Polling Hours cost certification survey will launch every fiscal year preceding a presidential primary, and every fiscal year preceding a state primary and general election. **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.

DLM conducts a thorough certification process for all 351 municipalities to make sure an accurate accounting of Uniform Polling Hours estimated expenses is submitted to the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

### **Q4 How do I complete the cost certification survey?**

DLM launched its new Survey Portal in December 2025. Each municipality has an account in the portal and invitations to access accounts were sent to municipal elections and other local officials. All cost certification survey responses must be submitted through the portal which can be accessed here: <https://massosa.forms.highgear.app/portal/DLMPortal/login>. Printable PDFs of surveys and a visual aide for navigating the portal are available on our website: <https://www.mass.gov/uniform-polling-hours-cost-certifications>. If you are a municipal elections or other local official and need access to your municipality's account in the portal, please email [DLM.CostCertification@MassAuditor.gov](mailto:DLM.CostCertification@MassAuditor.gov).

### **Q5 What elections will be covered by upcoming Uniform Polling Hours cost certification surveys; when will the surveys open and when will responses be due?**

A calendar of launch dates and deadlines for cost certification surveys will be regularly updated here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cost-certification-calendar-and-deadlines>. Email notifications will be sent to municipalities upon actual launch of a particular survey, which will specify the deadlines for that survey.

Uniform Polling Hours estimated costs will be collected and certified by the Office of the State Auditor (through DLM) and submitted to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, which may be on a rolling basis. Survey response deadlines are driven in part by statutory deadlines.

**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 the 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 *every 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 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.

**Q8 Can I edit my municipality's Uniform Polling Hours cost certification survey submission?**

Please make every effort to ensure the accuracy of your submission. Your submission can be accessed through the portal at <https://massosa.forms.highgear.app/portal/DLMPortal/login>. A visual aide for navigating the portal is available on our website: <https://www.mass.gov/uniform-polling-hours-cost-certifications>. You will only have **1 business day (24 hours)** after submission to review and make edits.

Please review your submission promptly by scrolling through the section tabs. If no edits are needed, no action is required. **If edits are needed**, you may make changes by clicking the orange "Edit Submission" button and resubmitting by clicking the green "Click Here to Submit Survey" button.

A PDF copy of your submission will be made available to you in the portal after the edit period has passed. To access the PDF in the portal, click on the submission labeled “Original Submission” and select the “Certification Clause” tab.

**Q9 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](mailto:elections@sec.state.ma.us), or by phone at 1-800-462-VOTE (8683).

**Q10 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->.

**Q11 My municipality will need to hire hourly temporary election workers for the first three hours of polling operations. Should I submit 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* may be submitted for certification as the expense would be an additional expense incurred due to the Uniform Polling Hours Law. Estimated compensation must be for workers and work essential to polling operations and estimates must be made in good faith. Only estimated compensation for hours that will be worked between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. may be submitted, with a maximum of 3 hours for any one worker. Examples:

1. If a municipality will hire 5 temporary election workers who will staff polling operations from 7 a.m. until 10 a.m., then estimated compensation for 15 total hours may be submitted.
2. If a municipality will hire 5 temporary election workers who will staff polling operations from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m., then estimated compensation for 10 total hours may be submitted (limited to hours between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. even though within 3-hour maximum).

See Q15 below regarding the ineligibility of estimated expenses for polling location set-up before 7 a.m. by temporary workers.

**Q12 My municipality will need to hire temporary election workers for election day and will be paying them a flat rate. Is any of their estimated pay eligible for certification?**

Under certain circumstances. If temporary election workers will be paid different flat rates *based on the number of hours worked* on election day, the extent of the flat rate for hours that will be worked between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. may be submitted for certification.

Estimated compensation for temporary election workers who will be paid a flat rate for election day *irrespective of hours worked* is **not** eligible for certification. Similarly, if the rate differs based on role/position but is the same rate *irrespective of hours worked* in a particular role/position, the estimated compensation is **not** eligible for certification.

**Q13 Can my municipality submit estimated costs for regular employees' compensation if they will be working the first three hours of polling operations?**

Under certain circumstances. Estimated compensation for regular employees of your municipality who will be staffing polls between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. may 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 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 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*, estimated compensation expenses will generally **not** be certified as salaried employees typically receive the same compensation regardless of hours worked. Estimated compensation expenses for salaried employees may be considered 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 if the hours are *additional* hours worked).

See Q15 below regarding estimated expenses for polling location set-up before 7 a.m. by municipal employees, which may be eligible for certification under certain circumstances.

**Q14 I will have police officers and/or constables detailed to polling locations throughout election day starting before polls open – are estimated expenses for their hours eligible for certification?**

Under certain circumstances. Estimated compensation for public safety officials (i.e., police officers and constables) who will be detailed to polling locations on election day before 10 a.m. may be submitted for certification if the compensation will be an *additional or increased* expense for your municipality. Estimates must be made in good faith.

**Temporary Hires:** Estimated compensation for public safety officials who *are not regular employees* of your municipality and who will be detailed to polling locations on election day may be submitted for hours before 10 a.m., with a maximum of 3 hours for any one official. Examples:

1. If a municipality will hire 5 public safety officials who will be detailed to polling locations from 6 a.m. until 10 a.m., then estimated

compensation for 15 total hours may be submitted (limited to 3-hour maximum).

2. If a municipality will hire 5 public safety officials who will be detailed to polling locations from 8 a.m. until 12 p.m., then estimated compensation for 10 total hours may be submitted (limited to hours before 10 a.m.).

**Regular Employees:** Estimated compensation for public safety officials who *are regular employees* of your municipality and who will be detailed to polling locations on election day may be submitted for hours before 10 a.m., with a maximum of 3 hours for any one official, **if:**

1. the detailed hours will cause the official to work more than the official's regular number of hours during the applicable pay period, **and**
2. the estimated compensation for those hours will cause the official to receive more than the official'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 for officials 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 detailed to polling locations before 10 a.m. Shifting the hours of public safety officials who are regular employees of your municipality to cover the first three hours of polling operations will not in and of itself result in additional or increased expenses.

**Flat Rates:** If public safety officials will be paid different flat rates *based on the number of hours* of the detail, the extent of the flat rate for hours before 10 a.m., with a maximum of 3 hours for any one official, may be submitted for certification. A flat rate for election day *irrespective of the number of hours* of the detail is **not** eligible for certification. Similarly, if the rate differs based on rank but is the same rate *irrespective of the number of hours* of the detail for a particular rank, the estimated compensation is not eligible for certification.

**Number of Public Safety Officials:** [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** public safety official **per polling location** is submitted, an explanation as to why (e.g., the municipality’s governing body/elections officials/police department have determined that one official is needed inside and one outside for each polling location, or that one official is needed for each precinct within the polling location due to its layout, or that additional officials are needed for traffic control due to the polling location, etc.) as well as the rationale or calculation behind the compensation rates submitted must be provided.

### **Q15 Will costs for setting up polling locations be certified?**

Generally, no. Polling location set-up expenses will typically be **ineligible** for certification as municipalities are required to provide polling locations for elections. Municipalities paying fixed amounts to municipal employees (e.g., a fixed payment of \$X to DPW employees for polling location set-up) or needing to hire temporary workers to perform polling location set-up before 7 a.m. would incur the expenses regardless.

However, estimated compensation payable to municipal employees for performing polling location set-up before 7 a.m. may be an estimated expense attributable to Uniform Polling Hours and submitted for consideration **if**:

1. working those hours 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 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.

### **Q16 My municipality will have rental expenses for polling locations – will the rental expense be certified?**

Generally, no. Polling location rental expenses will typically be **ineligible** for certification as municipalities are required to provide polling locations for

elections. Municipalities needing to rent polling locations would incur the expenses regardless, and rental agreements typically cover timeframes (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) that will already include the additional three hours of polling operations attributable to the Uniform Polling Hours Law. Estimated additional or increased rental costs that can be *specifically attributed* to the required additional first three hours of polling operations (i.e., the expenses would not be incurred but for those hours) may be submitted for consideration.

**Q17 My municipality incurred Uniform Polling Hours expenses for a special election that, by definition, could not be foreseen when I submitted my cost certification survey with estimated expenses. Can I amend my previously submitted survey or submit a new survey that includes expenses for a special election that has already occurred? If so, will those expenses be reimbursed?**

DLM conducts Uniform Polling Hours cost certification surveys to collect and certify *estimated* expenses for the *following* fiscal year in accordance with the Uniform Polling Hours Law ([Massachusetts Acts of 1983, c. 503](#)). The certified estimated expenses are provided to the Secretary of the Commonwealth who is responsible for requesting funding in the next fiscal year's budget and overseeing disbursement. Previously certified Uniform Polling Hours survey submissions should not be amended by a municipality and expenses for a special election that has already occurred should not be included in the next Uniform Polling Hours survey for estimated expenses for the following fiscal year.

DLM is not charged with collecting and certifying *actual* Uniform Polling Hours expenses. As there is no statutory requirement for reimbursement and no funding line item in the budget, funds may not be available even if a survey of actual costs were to be conducted. If a municipality believes Uniform Polling Hours for special elections to be an unfunded mandate, a municipality may seek a formal determination from DLM "whether the costs imposed by the commonwealth by any law, rule or regulation subject to this section have been paid in full by the commonwealth in the preceding year and, if not, the amount of any deficiency in such payments" ([M.G.L. c. 29, s. 27C\(d\)](#)). More information can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/local-mandate-determinations>.