

## St. Mary's County Board of Elections

23250 Leonardtown Hollywood Road  
Leonardtown, MD 20650

### Board Meeting Minutes of 5 April 2023

#### Present:

##### **Board Members:**

Jack Payne, Board President (R)  
Rebecca Wathen, Board Secretary (D)  
Kenneth Boothe, Member (R)  
Mary Coombs, Member (R)  
Ann Raley, Member (D)

##### **Staff Members:**

Wendy Adkins, Director  
Susan Julian, Deputy Director  
  
Cynthia Panos, Board Attorney

Absent:        None

At 11:04 AM, Mr. Jack Payne, Board President, determined that there was a quorum present and called the meeting to order.

Guests Present:        The guests present had signed in and were welcomed by Board President Payne. Sign In Sheet attached.

#### Documents Distributed:

- Precinct Consolidation and Ballot Drop Box Information
- Final version from the St. Mary's County Board of Elections response dated March 30, 2023 to the State Board of Elections regarding the 2022 Audit Election Procedures and Operations
- Copies of "hot" bills relating to Elections
- Ballot Drop Boxes by Maryland Counties compared to number of registered voters

Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the meetings held on March 1 and March 27, 2023 were presented. A motion was made by Ms. Wathen to approve the minutes, with corrections from the floor, seconded by Ms. Raley. Motion carried.

Meeting Agenda: The meeting agenda was reviewed and was revised to add the third voting center as a topic to be discussed under New Business.

Director's Report: Ms. Adkins reported the following:

- **Emergency Services Grant Funding** – Ms. Adkins met with Ms. Amy Bledsoe of the Emergency Management regarding the Homeland Security Grant Program. In reviewing the guidance, there are funds available that may be able to be used for "Election Security." The grant does have restrictions on how the money can be used, but Ms. Bledsoe will work with the LBE to fund extra parking lot security for the early voting centers and the largest consolidated precincts on Election Day. If the funding is unable to be used for this, Ms. Adkins advised that she will continue to work with Emergency Services Department to develop the safest plan.

- **Ethics Committee Meeting** – Ms. Adkins advised she and Tae attended the Ethics Commission meeting and answered their questions regarding their role when a candidate files their Ethics Paperwork when filing for office. Ms. Adkins advised the commission that the LBE is not permitted to review their Ethics Paperwork to ensure the completeness and accuracy. The Ethics Commission will attempt to make an ordinance change so that when a potential candidate files for a County Office, the Ethics Paperwork must be filed through the Ethics Commission first, obtain a receipt from them, which will then be brought to the LBE so that paperwork can be completed when the candidate files for office.
- **MAEO Meeting** – St. Mary’s County hosted their first Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) meeting on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023. There were over thirty individuals in attendance from the other counties in the State of Maryland. The meeting went very well.

#### Old Business:

- **2022 Gubernatorial Election Audit Results** – Ms. Adkins received the final audit report from the 2022 Primary and General Elections. The response to our audit was due on March 31<sup>st</sup>. Ms. Adkins advised that she and President Payne signed and returned the response. Copies were distributed to the Board members.
- **2023 MAEO Conference** – Tentative Meeting Agenda was provided to the Board members. The Conference is scheduled for May 14 – 19, 2023 in Ocean City, MD at the Ocean City Clarion.
- **2023 Legislative Update** - Ms. Adkins reported that legislation is in full swing in Annapolis and she has received a copy of the “hot” bills as determined by MAEO.
  - **HB447 – County Commissioner – District Voting** – the bill has not made it to the second reading yet.
  - **HB597 – County Commissioner Election Method – Straw Poll** – the bill has not made it to the second reading yet.
  - **HB1092 – Early Voting Number of Days** - the bill has not made it to the second reading yet.
  - **SB39 – Affiliating with a Party – Unaffiliated Voters** – the bill has not made it to the second reading yet.
  - **HB410 (Election Reform Act)** – Ms. Adkins advised that she and Ms. Julian were present in Annapolis to attend the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee (EEEC) meeting where MAEO members gathered oppose the bill. There was good representation from local boards who were there to oppose to the bill. Ms. Katie Berry (Chair of the MAEO Legislation Committee) did an excellent job speaking on behalf of MAEO. The EEEEC did not vote on the bill that day but did send the bill back to the Senate with amendments. This bill also proposed moving the Primary Election Day to May 17, 2024.
  - A list of bills related to Elections was provide to Board members in a separate handout

#### New Business:

- **2024 Election Polling Place Proposed Consolidation** – Ms. Adkins proposed that the Board consider consolidating precinct 01-01 - Spring Ridge Middle School (Café) and precinct 08-09 Spring Ridge Middle School (Gym) into one room. The room currently has a divider that separates the two polling places. The divider can be opened so that both precincts are in the same room. The consolidated site would receive six (6) poll books, two (2) DS200 Scanners, and two (2) BMD’s. Precinct 01-01 has 2227 registered voters and precinct 08-09 has 1814 registered voters. Consolidating to a single room would combine 4041 registered voters in a single location without the confusion for the voter to determine the appropriate room they need to vote in. This would eliminate voter frustration if they happen to get into

the wrong line and have to relocate to the second room to vote. A motion was made by Ms. Wathen to consolidate the two (2) precincts into a single room, seconded by Ms. Coombs. Motion carried.

- **2024 Ballot Drop Box Proposed Locations** – Ms. Adkins advised that since the last election cycle was not as effected by COVID as the pervious election cycle, she researched the number of ballot drop boxes that each Maryland County uses as compared to the number of registered voters in each County. Her data was provided to the Board members. **BACKGROUND:**
  - Ballot drop boxes were introduced in the 2020 election cycle during the COVID pandemic.
  - The 2020 Primary election was an all mail-in ballot election.
  - The 2020 General Election had one (1) early Voting Center and seven (7) Voting Centers on Election Day.
  - The ballot drop boxes were well received so it was determined that their use would continue in future election cycles.
  - The prior election cycle had eleven (11) drop boxes utilized.
  - There were 89 miles driven during each ballot pick-up and required about three (3) hours to complete.
  - Ballot boxes were emptied daily for a six-week period. During the last ten (10) of the six-week period, the ballots were picked-up twice a day.
  - Ms. Adkins is proposing that we reduce the number of drop boxes to six (6). This will reduce the mileage and amount of time required to pick up the ballots in each drop box. Data related to the ballot box usage was provided to the Board Members
- Security presented another obstacle for the drop box locations:
  - Drop Boxes are required to have 24/7 video surveillance.
  - This surveillance is required to be retained by law for the entire six-week pick up period for a total of twenty two (22) months.
  - The video footage must be readily available if needed
  - Schools in St. Mary’s County only hold their surveillance footage for 30 days, which does not meet the statutory requirements.
  - Additionally, a court order would be required in order to obtain the needed video footage from the school system.
  - Hollywood Fire Department does not want to be held libel for the surveillance, so the LBE has used a County owned camera to provide the required 24/7 surveillance.
  - Ms. Adkins advised that it is her desire to contract with an independent company to record the video surveillance so that the LBE can control the footage that is required. However, the cost may be prohibitive.
  - According to the SBE, the video footage is part of the Public Information Act and is considered election related material thus requiring that it be held for twenty two (22) months following the election.
  - SBE is willing to split the cost of the video surveillance 50/50 with County LBEs.
- Ms. Adkins reviewed the box location data with the Board Members.
- A vote will made at a future meeting.

At this time, our guests were invited to speak:

- Ms. Ann Marie Abell requested that the LBE ensure that early voting centers, Election Day Precinct locations, and drop box locations be available and accessible to the public. Ms. Abell requested that the LBE focus on voter education so that voters understand Drop Boxes and Mail In Ballot processes. Ms. Abell questioned how many voters each precinct should serve.

- Ms. Adkins responded and advised that all early voting centers and polling locations have to be evaluated for accessibility both prior to the election and on election day and that the SBE has to approve all locations before they can be used.
- Ms. Adkins also responded that many efforts are made to educate voters using the County Government's website, direct mailings, publication in local papers, and through social media. Organizations have also request training sessions, which have been conducted by the LBE Staff.
- Ms. Adkins explained how polling locations are selected based upon the number of registered voters, locations within city limits, locations within historically disadvantaged areas, and census data.
- Mr. Mike Brown expressed his concern regarding coverage in the Colton's Point area.
  - Based upon the information that Ms. Adkins provided regarding polling site selection, security requirements, and other election laws and regulations, Mr. Brown advised that he understood how the selection process worked.
- **Third Early Voting Center**
  - At a recent Commissioners meeting, the number of early voting centers was reduced from three (3) centers to two (2) centers.
  - The LBE was not contacted to determine the impact this would have on the election cycle.
  - The early voting center that was eliminated was the Mechanicsville Fire House, which is the Election Day polling location for Precincts 05-01, 05-02, and 05-03 and serves over 8000 registered voters.
  - There are twenty five (25) election judges needed each day during Early Voting in addition to the cost of the facility rental.
  - Hollywood Fire House was the original Early Voting Center location and most people are familiar with this facility and continue to use it.
  - Bay District Fire House was added during the last Election Cycle. This location is required by State Law due to the vicinity of it being within a historically disadvantaged area.
  - The last Gubernatorial Election had a 55-60% voter turn out
  - The last Presidential Election had a 75-77% turn out.
  - During this last Early Voting cycle, the voter turnout at each Early Voting Center was
 

▪ Hollywood	4826 voters	6.00%
▪ Bay District	2129 voters	2.83%
▪ Mechanicsville	2119 voters	2.81%
  - Ms. Adkins requested that the third early voting center remain in place at least through the next Presidential Election so that a valid comparison of voter usage can be made between like elections vice the comparison between Gubernatorial vs Presidential elections. Presidential elections in St. Mary's County historically has shown a large turnout of 75-77% of registered voters consistently.


Commissioner Eric Colvin stated that during the Commissioner's Budget Work Session discussion, the Early Voting Centers were a topic of discussion and the Commissioners adjusted the number from three (3) centers down to two (2), which is the minimum required by law. Based upon the discussion held during this meeting and the information that Commissioner Colvin learned, he advised that the three (3) voting centers was a fairly reasonable request.

A motion that the Board of Elections send a letter to the St. Mary's County Commissions to keep three (3) Early Voting Centers in place was made by Ms. Coombs, seconded by Ms. Wathen. Motion Carried. Ms. Adkins will draft the letter for signature.

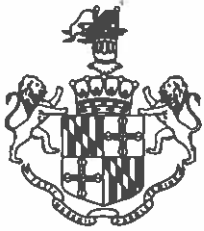
**Next Meeting:** There will be no May meeting since we will be attending the MAEO Conference. The next meeting will be on June 7, 2023 at 9:00 AM.

A motion was made by Ms. Wathen to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Coombs. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Rebecca J. Wathen  
Board Secretary





ST. MARY'S COUNTY  
1637

# BOARD OF ELECTIONS FOR ST. MARY'S COUNTY

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## ST. MARY'S COUNTY ELECTION BOARD MEETING

April 5, 2023

### Guest Sign in Sheet

1. AnnMarie Abell

(Please Print)

2. Jennifer Boyd

(Please Print)

3. ERIC COLVIN

(Please Print)

4. Mike Brown

(Please Print)

5. \_\_\_\_\_

(Please Print)

6. \_\_\_\_\_

(Please Print)

7. \_\_\_\_\_

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