

Election Commission Basic Information

There are currently 8 election commissions in the state of Illinois. DuPage and Peoria both have county wide election commissions. Bloomington, Chicago, Danville, Galesburg, East St. Louis, and Rockford all have city commissions. These election commissions are the election authority for more than 48% of all voters in the state.

Any city can establish a city Election Commission. There must be a petition passed that obtains 1000 signatures or one-eighth of the eligible voters if the city has less than 1000 voters. Then the referendum will be placed on the ballot of the next election. If the voters elect to establish a commission it must be open within 30 days.

According to current election law, a county can establish a county election commission by two different means, but it can only do so if there is not a city commission within the county. The County Board can pass a resolution causing the establishment of a commission, or the county can go through the same process it would take to establish a city commission. The county board could also try to change legislation to alter the means to establish a commission. Peoria county did this to establish their county election commission.

An election commission is not a unit of local government within the means of Section 8 of Article VII of the 1970 State Constitution. Therefore an election commission is independent to run elections without the undue influence of the county, city, or local politicians. The salaries of the commissioners, executive director, and the assistant director are paid by the county. By law the county is required to pay for all elections expenses, so there is a written agreement between the county, city, and the commission on how the funding for the commission is handled.

After an election commission is established, the circuit court appoints 3 commissioners to the board on a staggered basis, so that a different commissioner will be up for reappointment each year. The law requires that each of the two major political parties have a representative on the commission board. The third commissioner can represent either of the two major parties or be non-affiliated to a political party. Currently if a commissioner resigns or the judge decides to not reappoint a commissioner, then the judge orders the commission to advertise the vacancy. The commission will collect the resumes from all interested applicants; print the voting history of each applicant, and forwards these materials to the circuit court judge. The judge will review the resumes, interview selected applicants, and appoint a new commissioner.

Complaints can be filed against a commissioner to the circuit court judge. A complaint must be signed by 25 legal voters and a hearing conducted to see if the complaint is valid. If it is found to be valid, the judge can order the removal of any commissioner.

The commission board (here after called the board) has the right to hire an executive director, an attorney, and an independent auditor. In Bloomington, the board hires an executive director, an assistant director, and an attorney. The executive director is in charge of the daily operations of the commission, including the hiring of additional staff if needed. Each December, the board conducts a work review of the director and the assistant director and decides if they will extend their contracts for the following year. Pay raises are also considered for the staff at this time. Complaints against the director or the assistant director can be filed with the board at any board meeting or by sending a letter to the board.

The process for closing an election commission is similar to opening a commission. A petition must be circulated that obtains 1000 signatures or one-eighth of eligible voters if the city has less than 1000 voters to put the referendum on the ballot. Legislation changes can also be attempted to establish other means to close a city commission. There was a legislation change made when Peoria County voted to establish a County commission which superseded the city commission and closed it. To close a county election commission a petition must be passed that obtains the signatures of 10% of all eligible voters.