

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: VOTER INTIMIDATION AT THE POLLS



The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized that polling places should be an “island of calm,” free from distraction and interference. Yet the history of the United States, including Connecticut, has included racist attempts to suppress the political power of voters of color, especially Black voters, through intimidation at the polls. Every voter has the right to vote in a safe polling place without intimidation and suppression, and Connecticut has legal obligations and a moral responsibility to protect those rights.

Examples of voter intimidation

- Aggressively questioning voters about their citizenship, criminal record, or other qualifications to vote. Falsely representing oneself as an elections official.
- Displaying false or misleading signs about voter fraud and related criminal penalties.
- Other forms of harassment, particularly harassment targeting voters of color and people who speak languages other than English.
- Spreading false information about voter requirements.
 - You do not need to speak English to vote, in any state.
 - You do not need to pass a test to vote, in any state.
 - Connecticut does not require voters to present photo identification.

Your rights

- It’s illegal to intimidate voters and a federal crime to “intimidate, threaten, [or] coerce ... any other person for the purpose of interfering with the right of [that] other person to vote or to vote as he may choose.”
- It’s illegal under Connecticut law to use force, threat, or deceit to keep voters from voting, and it is illegal to use force or threat to influence a person’s vote. Connecticut law also makes it illegal to interfere with ballots or ballot counting.
- Every polling place in Connecticut has a designated moderator, whose job is to manage the polling place and prevent disruptions to voting. If voter intimidation or other disruptions occur at the polling place, the moderator has the discretion to use non-police responses to disruptions, which should be the preferred response. If the moderator does make the decision to call the police, the moderator still maintains control over the polling place, and may insist that police only intervene against vote suppressors or disruptors and not against people trying to vote.

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Your rights

- Under Connecticut law, the only people who can be within 75 feet of the entrance of a polling place are: voters while voting and children accompanying them; poll workers performing their duties, including registrars of voters (but not other elected officials, unless they are voting themselves); the Secretary of the State or their designee; a person assisting a voter at the voter's request (which cannot be a candidate for office on the ballot unless they are an immediate family member); members of the press while reporting the news; registered checkers, as designated on the poll moderator's list; moderator-approved information runners; police/fire/EMS only as necessary; non-partisan activities approved by the registrar of voters; PTO bakesale participants if the polling place is in a school; and student observers in grades 4-12, with parental or teacher supervision, to learn about the election process. Everyone else, including any self-appointed "watchdog" groups, must be 75 feet away.
- If someone is disrupting voting within 75 feet of the polling place, the moderator has the right to evict them from the polling place. If that person is eligible to vote at that polling place and has not yet done so, they are allowed to do so only when they are willing to do so without disrupting the polls.
- Police should only be called as a last resort, especially in situations where their presence could intimidate Black or Latinx people from voting. If voters or local election workers call police to report voter intimidation, the only proper role for police is to protect the people who are attempting to vote. If police intervention is necessary, that intervention must be directed only toward people who are attempting to intimidate voters.

What to do if you experience voter intimidation

- In Connecticut, you can give a sworn statement to the poll worker that you satisfy the qualifications to vote in your state, and then proceed to cast a ballot.
- **Report intimidation to the Election Protection Hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE or 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (en Español).**
- Report intimidation to the Connecticut Secretary of the State's Election Day hotline and email at 1-866-733-2463 and elections@ct.gov. Their offices will be open on Election Day.
- Report intimidation directly to the moderator of your polling place. If you are unsure who the moderator is, ask one of the official poll workers, who will be clearly identifiable.