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## A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR BALLOT

**Preview your ballot online.** About a month before every election, the State Election Board publishes ballot previews online. This is a great way to begin learning who and what is on the ballot so that you can do your research and be an informed voter. You can view your ballot by logging into the [OK Voter Portal](#) and clicking on “Sample Ballot.”

### **What do all of these elected offices DO, anyway?**

Oklahoma has a *lot* of elected positions, and that’s because the framers of our state constitution wanted to ensure that the people of our state had a say in choosing who runs our government. If you’re not sure what some of the offices actually do, we’ve created a brief summary for each one.

### **STATE OFFICERS**

- **Governor.** Highest ranking member of the executive branch; you can think of it as the “President” of the state. The Governor has the power to sign or veto laws passed by the state legislature. Has the power to appoint members to the Cabinet, heads of state agencies, and members of the Oklahoma Supreme Court, Pardon & Parole Board, State Board of Education, Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, and many boards and commissions. The Governor also serves as an *ex officio* member of many of those boards and commissions, including the Commissioners of the Land Office, Board of Education, and Ethics Commission, among others. The Governor can also declare a state of emergency, which then provides he or she with additional emergency powers, including the ability to activate the Oklahoma National Guard.
- **Lieutenant Governor.** The lieutenant governor is like the “Vice President” of the state. The Lt. Governor serves as acting Governor whenever the Governor is out of the state and is the first in line to succeed the Governor upon the death, resignation, or removal of the Governor. The Lt. Governor also serves as President of the Oklahoma State Senate and may cast the tie-breaking votes in that chamber. The Lt. Governor also serves as an *ex officio* member on several

boards and commissions, and as of 2021, the Lt. Governor also serves as a member of the Governor's cabinet as the Secretary of Tourism and Branding.

- **Attorney General:** The Attorney General serves as the state's chief legal officer and advisor. They are responsible for representing the state's interests in legal matters, providing legal counsel to state agencies, and defending Oklahoma's laws and constitution in court. The Attorney General's office handles a wide range of duties, including enforcing consumer protection laws, investigating and prosecuting cases of public corruption, overseeing charitable organizations, and advocating for Oklahoma's interests in federal and interstate matters. Additionally, the Attorney General plays a crucial role in promoting public safety, ensuring compliance with state regulations, and supporting initiatives that protect the rights and well-being of Oklahoma residents. Overall, the Attorney General in Oklahoma plays a vital role in both legal enforcement and advocacy, aiming to uphold the rule of law and serve the interests of the state and its citizens.
- **State Treasurer:** The State Treasurer plays a crucial role in managing the state's finances and overseeing various fiscal responsibilities. Their primary duties include managing the state's investments to ensure optimal returns while maintaining liquidity for government operations. The State Treasurer also administers the state's banking services, including overseeing the collection and disbursement of state funds and managing the state's debt obligations. They work closely with state agencies, local governments, and financial institutions to ensure compliance with financial regulations and to promote transparency in financial transactions. Additionally, the State Treasurer serves as a key advocate for financial literacy and education initiatives, helping Oklahomans understand personal finance and savings strategies. Overall, the Oklahoma State Treasurer plays a pivotal role in safeguarding and efficiently managing the state's financial resources to support economic stability and growth.
- **State Superintendent of Public Instruction:** The State Superintendent of Public Instruction is responsible for overseeing the state's public education system. This role includes implementing and enforcing education policies set by the State Board of Education, advocating for educational funding and resources, and ensuring compliance with state and federal education laws. The State Superintendent works closely with school districts, educators, parents, and stakeholders to improve educational outcomes and address challenges within the education system. They play a critical role in developing and implementing educational standards, curriculum guidelines, and assessment frameworks to enhance student achievement and school accountability. Additionally, the State

Superintendent serves as a spokesperson for education issues, collaborates with lawmakers on education legislation, and promotes initiatives that support the professional development of educators and the overall advancement of public education in Oklahoma.

- **Commissioner of Labor:** In Oklahoma, the Commissioner of Labor oversees and enforces state labor laws to ensure fair treatment of workers and promote safe working environments. This role involves monitoring compliance with wage and hour regulations, investigating workplace safety concerns, and addressing employment discrimination issues. The Commissioner administers unemployment insurance programs to support individuals facing job loss and collaborates with stakeholders to enhance workforce development initiatives. Additionally, they collect and analyze data on employment trends and economic indicators to inform labor policies and advocate for workers' rights through public education and outreach efforts. Overall, the Commissioner of Labor in Oklahoma plays a crucial role in safeguarding labor rights, promoting workplace fairness, and supporting the state's economic vitality through effective labor administration and policy enforcement.
- **Corporation Commissioners.** Oklahoma elects three (3) Corporation Commissioners to regulate the state's public utilities, oil and gas drilling and storage, gas station pumps, railroads, private water companies, and a few other things. Each Corporation Commissioner is elected statewide (i.e. represents the entire state). They serve six-year terms and each person can serve a maximum of two terms.

## **LEGISLATIVE**

- Oklahoma State Senate
- Oklahoma House of Representatives

## **DISTRICT AND COUNTY OFFICERS**

- **District Attorney:** The District Attorney (DA) serves as the chief prosecutor responsible for representing the state in criminal cases within their judicial district. Their duties encompass reviewing evidence gathered by law enforcement, deciding whether to pursue criminal charges, and presenting cases in court. DAs work closely with law enforcement agencies during investigations, provide legal guidance, and ensure that all aspects of the prosecution adhere to legal standards and procedures. Beyond prosecution, DAs also play a role in advocating for victims' rights, negotiating plea agreements, and promoting

community safety through outreach and educational initiatives. Overall, the Oklahoma District Attorney's office plays a pivotal role in upholding justice, ensuring fair trials, and maintaining public trust in the legal system.

- **County Commissioners:** A County commissioner plays a crucial role in local government, overseeing various administrative and policy-making duties within their designated county. Their responsibilities typically include managing the county's budget, which involves allocating funds for public services such as roads, parks, and law enforcement. Commissioners also collaborate with other officials to develop and implement policies that affect the county's residents, businesses, and infrastructure. They serve as a liaison between the county government and the community, addressing constituent concerns, organizing public hearings, and ensuring transparency in government operations. Overall, Oklahoma County Commissioners play a pivotal role in shaping and improving the quality of life for residents through effective governance and strategic decision-making.
- **County Assessor:** A County Assessor is responsible for determining the assessed value of all taxable property within the county. This includes residential, commercial, agricultural, and personal property. The assessor ensures that property valuations are fair and equitable, adhering to state laws and guidelines. They play a crucial role in the property tax system by calculating property taxes based on these assessments. Additionally, the assessor provides information and assistance to property owners regarding their assessments and tax obligations. They may also oversee the process of reviewing and appealing property valuations as needed. Ultimately, the Oklahoma County Assessor's office plays a fundamental role in generating revenue for local governments and ensuring the accuracy and fairness of property tax assessments across the county.
- **County Treasurer:** A County Treasurer is responsible for managing the county's finances, specifically focusing on the receipt, custody, and disbursement of county funds. They collect property taxes, distribute funds to various county departments and entities, and maintain accurate records of all financial transactions. County Treasurers also invest surplus funds to generate additional revenue for the county, ensuring compliance with state laws and county policies regarding investment practices. They play a crucial role in financial planning and budgeting processes, providing financial reports and recommendations to county officials and stakeholders. Additionally, County Treasurers often interact with taxpayers, providing information about tax payments and assisting with inquiries

related to financial matters. Overall, they are essential in maintaining fiscal responsibility and transparency within Oklahoma counties.

- **County Sheriff:** A County Sheriff is an elected official responsible for maintaining law and order within their jurisdiction. They oversee law enforcement activities, including patrolling county areas, investigating crimes, and making arrests. Sheriffs manage county jails and detention facilities, ensuring the safe custody and care of inmates. They also serve legal documents, such as subpoenas and warrants, and provide court security during judicial proceedings. Additionally, Sheriffs collaborate with other law enforcement agencies, local officials, and community groups to promote public safety and crime prevention initiatives. As elected officials, they are accountable to the residents of their county and often participate in community outreach efforts to build trust and address concerns within the community they serve.
- **County Clerk:** A county clerk is a key administrative official responsible for managing a wide range of duties primarily related to record-keeping and public services within their county. This role includes overseeing the filing and maintenance of various legal documents such as deeds, mortgages, liens, and marriage licenses. County clerks also manage voter registration and elections, ensuring the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process. They may issue and maintain official records, including birth and death certificates, and serve as the custodian of county records, making them accessible to the public as required by law. Additionally, county clerks often play a vital role in supporting county commissioners and other local government officials by providing administrative support and facilitating public meetings. Overall, the county clerk in Oklahoma serves as a central figure in local governance, ensuring transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in county-level operations and public services.
- **Court Clerk:** A court clerk performs essential administrative tasks within the judicial system. Their responsibilities include managing court records, which involves filing legal documents, maintaining case files, and ensuring all paperwork is properly organized and accessible for judges, attorneys, and the public. Court clerks also schedule court hearings, process fees and fines, and assist with jury selection and coordination during trials. They play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of court proceedings by accurately documenting court decisions, orders, and judgments. Additionally, court clerks provide information to the public regarding court procedures, case statuses, and legal resources, serving as a point of contact for inquiries related to the court system. Overall,

court clerks in Oklahoma contribute significantly to the efficient operation of the judiciary by supporting judges, attorneys, and the public through their diligent management of court records and procedural tasks.

## **LOCAL OFFICES**

- **Mayor**
  - NOTES:
    - Many cities elect a mayor directly (e.g. OKC) but some simply city council members and then the council chooses among themselves who will serve as Mayor. I think it's mostly smaller towns that do it that way; The Village is one example. I think council member serve four-year terms and the mayor is chosen by the council to serve for a period of time...not sure how long.)
    - The role & responsibilities of the mayor varies by city. Some cities have a "strong mayor" system (e.g. Tulsa) and others have a "weak mayor" system (e.g. OKC).
- **City Council** (some municipalities may call them something different - trustees, etc.)
- **Local School Boards** (I would include a statement at the end of this section like this:
  - Local school boards are often confused with the Oklahoma State Board of Education. While local school board members are elected by voters, the members of the State Board of Education are appointed by the Governor. For more information about the State Board of Education, [click here](#).

## **JUDICIAL OFFICERS**

- **District Judge:** A district judge presides over legal proceedings within their assigned judicial district, which can encompass both civil and criminal cases. District judges are responsible for interpreting and applying the law impartially while ensuring fair trials and equitable resolutions. Their duties include presiding over trials, hearings, and motions; ruling on legal issues and motions filed by attorneys; and overseeing jury selection and deliberations. District judges also review evidence presented by parties, instruct juries on legal principles, and issue verdicts or judgments based on the facts and applicable law. Beyond trials, they may handle matters such as injunctions, protective orders, and other legal remedies. District judges play a pivotal role in upholding justice, maintaining courtroom decorum, and safeguarding the rights of individuals involved in legal disputes within their jurisdiction.

- **Associate District Judge:** An associate district judge serves as a judicial officer within the state's district court system, primarily handling a variety of legal matters at the county level. They preside over both civil and criminal cases that fall within their jurisdiction, which may include conducting trials, hearings, and other proceedings. Associate district judges are responsible for interpreting and applying the law, ensuring due process, and making rulings on legal issues presented during cases. They also review evidence, consider arguments from attorneys, and deliver judgments or verdicts based on the law and the facts presented. Associate district judges play a crucial role in the local judicial system by administering justice fairly, resolving disputes, and upholding the rule of law within their assigned counties.

## **JUDICIAL RETENTION**

- **Justices of the Oklahoma Supreme Court:** A Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court serves as a crucial member of the highest judicial authority in the state. Their primary role is to interpret and uphold the Oklahoma Constitution and state laws through the review and adjudication of cases brought before the court. Justices participate in the decision-making process on complex legal issues, hearing appeals from lower courts on matters of both civil and criminal law. They carefully review briefs, legal arguments, and precedents to ensure decisions align with established legal principles and serve the interests of justice. Justices also contribute to shaping legal interpretations that can have significant implications for the state's legal landscape and its residents. Beyond their judicial duties, Oklahoma Supreme Court Justices often engage in community outreach, legal education, and initiatives aimed at improving the administration of justice throughout the state.
- **Judges of the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals:** Justices of the Court of Appeals serve as appellate judges responsible for reviewing decisions made by lower courts. They play a crucial role in ensuring the fair and consistent application of the law by carefully examining legal arguments, reviewing case records, and considering precedents. Justices of the Court of Appeals do not conduct trials but rather focus on determining whether lower court decisions were legally sound and properly applied. They write opinions that explain their decisions, which can establish new legal interpretations or clarify existing laws. Justices of the Court of Appeals contribute to the development of Oklahoma's legal jurisprudence by resolving disputes and promoting justice through their thoughtful consideration of appellate cases.