

## THE OFFICE OF COUNTY SUPERVISOR

*The first and most difficult challenge faced by a member of a local governing body in any Virginia community is to understand the role he or she has in local government affairs. In pledging "faithfully and impartially [to] discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon me," the supervisor accepts the challenge of discharging his or her responsibilities to produce sound public policy, while working within the legal framework established by the federal and state constitutions, statutes, court opinions, and executive rules and regulations.*

*The county supervisor in the great majority of Virginia counties, as in most counties in the United States, exercises a dual role by serving on a governing body that has both policy-making and administrative functions. As the county's legislative body, the board of supervisors is responsible for enacting the ordinances that guide the course of local government. In the traditionally organized counties, the board has the additional responsibility of acting as the administrative head of the government in seeing that these policies are carried out.*

*The powers, duties, and responsibilities of each individual supervisor stem primarily from his or her position as a member of a collective body, the board of supervisors. The supervisor today is primarily a county officer rather than an official of the election or magisterial district from which elected. Thus, the supervisor has no district duties to perform other than representing the inhabitants of the district on the county board. It is in the role as representative that the individual supervisor will have to balance obligations to the election or magisterial district from which elected with obligations to the county as a whole.*

## APPORTIONMENT OF ELECTION DISTRICTS

*Election districts of Virginia counties stem from a mandate of the Constitution of 1868 that required the General Assembly to divide each county into townships, with each township electing one supervisor and the supervisors so elected constituting the board of supervisors. This mandated division was accomplished by the General Assembly in its 1869-70 session. A constitutional amendment in 1874, also implemented by the General Assembly, converted the townships into magisterial districts, and they continued as election districts until 1971. A few counties subsequently were reapportioned by use of a judicial proceeding provided by statute.*

*A United States Supreme Court decision issued in 1968 required, however, that county supervisors as well as all other Virginia state and local officials be elected on a basis of equal representation, i.e., the "one man, one vote" principal. Thus, the Constitution of 1971 includes a provision stipulating that magisterial or election districts be reapportioned to provide equal representation of the population. This provision was implemented by the General Assembly in 1971 when it passed a statute that placed the responsibility for ten years thereafter, to be based of the U.S. decennial census.*

## QUALIFICATIONS OF SUPERVISORS

*To be eligible to hold public office in Virginia, a person must be qualified to vote for the office and must have been a resident of Virginia for one year immediately preceding his or her election. Candidates for the office of supervisor must meet the broader qualifications for general electors. A candidate must be a citizen of the United States and at least eighteen years of age on or before the date of the general election in which he offers for office and registered to vote in the precinct where he lives by the date on which he must qualify as a candidate. Residence for voting purposes requires both domicile, which is the subjective intent to remain in Virginia for an indefinite period, and place of abode, the physical place where one lives. Persons convicted of a felony and persons adjudged mentally incompetent are disqualified from voting, and hence from holding public office, until their civil rights have been restored. The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended in 1970, 1975 and 1982 prohibits any state or political subdivision from imposing any voting qualifications such as a literacy test in order "to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color" or "because he is a member of a language minority group."*

*Other qualifications must be met as stated by the State Board of Elections.*