

Office of the  
Chief Electoral Officer  
of Ontario



Bureau du directeur  
général des élections  
de l'Ontario

November 7, 2013

Mr. Peter Wallace  
Secretary of the Cabinet and  
Clerk of the Executive Council  
Room 6420, Whitney Block  
99 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, Ontario  
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Dear Mr. Wallace,

The *Election Act* provides, in Section 9.1, that when an election is to be held, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may order that the writ or writs for the election be issued and appoint and proclaim a day for the close of nominations, the grant of a poll and, where required, polling day. Polling day shall be the fifth Thursday after the date of the writ.

The *Election Act*, subsection 9.1(6) further provides that “if the Chief Electoral Officer is of the opinion that a Thursday that would otherwise be polling day is not suitable for that purpose because it is a day of cultural or religious significance, the Chief Electoral Officer shall choose another day in accordance with subsection (7) and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that polling day should be that other day, and the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make an order to that effect.”

My office has fulfilled this requirement with respect to the first six months for 2014. We have conducted a review of cultural and religious considerations in Ontario in accordance with the Elections Ontario *Days of Cultural and Religious Significance Policy*, the key principles of which are as follows:

- Every reasonable effort should be made to allow eligible electors to observe their religious holidays without compromising their democratic right to vote;
- While being sensitive to the observance of days of cultural importance, Elections Ontario should ensure that its assessment of the significance of such days, and evaluation of the potential impact on the group(s) affected, strikes a balance between the provision of reasonable accommodation and the need to maintain the integrity of the electoral system.

Alternative arrangements should be made to facilitate voters who are unable to vote on a polling day that, notwithstanding the Chief Electoral Officer's determination, is deemed by such persons to be a day of religious or cultural significance.

Accordingly, in October 2013, my office surveyed organizations representing cultural and religious interests across Ontario. We distributed a survey to 307 organizations and posted the survey on our web site and social media sites for two weeks in October 2013. The survey posed the following questions:

Q1: During the period spanning January 1 to December 31, 2014, are there any dates of cultural or religious significance occurring on a Thursday for your organization and the community it serves? *If Yes, please specify the date(s) and describe the significance of these date(s).*

Q2: The *Election Act* requires 12 consecutive hours for voting. Normally, this is between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. on polling day. If you answered “yes” to the above question, is the nature of this day/these days significant such that it would prevent your members from casting their ballot during these voting hours? *If Yes, please explain.*

We received 45 survey responses. We augmented this information with an in-house review of dates of religious and cultural significance, consulting other sources including the BBC Interfaith Calendar, Judaism101 and [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org).

I have enclosed a report that gives a complete overview of the research conducted and a calendar of all dates of religious and cultural significance in 2014 identified by my office; and a detailed analysis for each date occurring on a Thursday for the first six months of 2014.

Our research indicated the following days of cultural or religious significance between January and June:

- January 16: Tu B'Shevat (Jewish)
- January 16: Mahayana New Year (Buddhist)
- February 27: Ayyam-i-Ha (Baha'i)
- February 27: Maha Siva Ratri (Hindu)
- March 13: Feast of Esther (Jewish)
- March 13: H. Ron Hubbard Birthday (Scientology)
- March 20: Spring Equinox-Eoster (Pagan)
- March 20: Shubun –sai/ Shunki-sorei-sai (Shinto)
- March 27: Holi (Hindu)
- April 17: Maundy Thursday (Christian)
- April 17: Passover (Jewish)
- May 1: Beltane (Pagan)
- May 1: Labour Day/International Workers' Day (International/Secular)
- May 29: Ascension of Baha'u'llah (Baha'i)
- May 29: Ascension Day (Christian)
- June 5: Shavuot (Jewish)
- June 19: Corpus Christi (Christian)
- June 19: New Church Day (Swedenborgian Christian)

We have presented a detailed analysis of the dates of significance listed above, in order to make a recommendation as to whether or not these holy days may affect voting if an election were held on that day.

After consulting with experts and representatives of religious and cultural communities in Ontario, my office has been advised that the following dates would not be suitable for polling day and I am therefore recommending alternative dates to the Lieutenant Governor in Council under subsection 9.1(6) of the *Election Act*:

- **April 17** coincides with the Christian holy day Maundy Thursday and the Jewish holy day Passover. In the seven days following April 17, my office has found that **Thursday April 24** is the most suitable alternative for polling day.
- **June 5** coincides with the Jewish holy day Shavuot. In the seven days following June 5, my office has found that **Thursday, June 12** is the most suitable alternative for polling day.

With regards to the remaining holy days listed above, while some cultural and or religious observances may occur on these dates, voting would not be contrary to any religious observance and does not infringe on the ability to vote.

My office will provide a second report in March 2014 that will include additional analysis of each day of cultural or religious significance from July 2014 until the end of the year.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Essensa  
Chief Electoral Officer