

Absentee Canvassing Quick Guide



Provided by the:

Arkansas State Board of Election Commissioners

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Dear Election Official,

The State Board of Election Commissioners is pleased to provide you with this copy of the *Absentee Canvassing Quick Guide*. This Quick Guide covers some of the more common procedures that absentee ballot canvassing officials may face.

Specifically, this guide addresses:

- Opening and processing absentee ballots;
- Guidelines for evaluating the validity of absentee ballots;
- Provisional absentee ballots; and
- Counting absentee ballots generally.

The State Board recommends that absentee ballot canvassing officials keep these Quick Guides handy for reference throughout absentee ballot canvassing.

We would also like to thank you again for your service as an election official. The State Board of Election Commissioners recognizes and appreciates all that you do to ensure successful elections and hopes that this quick guide will assist you on Election Day.

Please feel free to call upon us or your county election commission at any time.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Clay".

Justin Clay
Director

OPENING AND PROCESSING ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Absentee ballots must be opened, processed and counted by election clerks **before** the polls close on election day.

1. One by one an election official (Clerk 1), while observed by another election official, opens the return (outer) envelope and verifies that the voter statement, identification (if the ballot is from a flagged voter*) and the ballot (inner) envelope have been properly placed in the return envelope.
2. If the voter statement and ID (if the ballot is from a flagged voter), are in the return envelope separate from the inner "Ballot Only" envelope:
 - Clerk 1 reads aloud the voter's name and precinct from the voter statement.
 - Clerk 2 lists in duplicate the name and precinct of the voter. The duplicated list can be a carbon copy, photo copy, or hand-written copy of the original list.
 - The election officials compare the name, address, date of birth and signature on the absentee ballot application against the same information on the voter statement.
 - The election officials compare the information on the voter's identification (if the ballot is from a flagged voter) against the information on the voter statement.
 - The election officials compare the name and address of the bearer, agent or administrator written on the absentee ballot return envelope with the information on the voter statement.
 - If everything is in order, place the unopened inner "Ballot Only" envelope into the absentee ballot box.
 - Repeat the process for each absentee voter whose materials are in order.

If the voter statement and/or ID (if the ballot is from a flagged voter) are **NOT** in the return envelope separate from the inner "Ballot Only" envelope:

1. Clerk 1 removes the inner "Ballot Only" envelope from the outer return envelope and hands it to Clerk 2.
2. Clerk 2 inspects the inner "Ballot Only" envelope while being observed by clerk 1 and,
3. Removes the voter statement and/or identification documents, if found there, from the inner "Ballot Only" envelope and hands them to Clerk 1.
4. Clerk 2 returns the inner "Ballot Only" envelope and any found voter statement/ID documents to Clerk 1 and Clerk 1 places the inner "Ballot Only" envelope back into the outer return envelope.
5. Clerk 1 reads aloud from the voter statement, and regular processing procedures (see above) are followed.

**Certain voters (e.g. first time voters who registered by mail and did not include identification when registering) may be "flagged" with a "must show ID" notation on the Precinct Voter Registration List (PVR). If voting by absentee ballot, these "flagged" voters must include in the return envelope a copy of a current and valid photo identification or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter. If identification is not present, the ballot is considered a provisional ballot.*

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING VALIDITY OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS

- A name on a voter statement that is slightly different from the way the name is stated on the absentee ballot application (John A. Doe on one; John Doe on the other, for instance) “compares” if **all** the other information (DOB, address, signature) demonstrates that it is the same person.
- Dates of birth must match. 4-11-1953 does not match 11-4-1953, for instance.
- Addresses must match. 102 Main Street and 201 Main Street do not match, for instance.
- Election officials are not handwriting experts. Reject a ballot on the basis that the signatures do not compare only if there is a distinct and easily recognizable difference between the signature on the absentee ballot application and the voter statement.
- Certain voters (e.g. first-time voters who registered by mail and did not include identification when registering) may be “flagged” with a “must show ID” notation on the Precinct Voter Registration List (PVR). If voting by absentee ballot, these “flagged” voters must include in the return envelope a copy of a **current and valid** photo identification or a copy of a **current** utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the **name and address** of the voter. If identification is not present, the ballot is considered a **provisional** ballot.
- If there is any doubt about the validity of a ballot, set it aside for the election commission to review.

PROVISIONAL ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Provisional absentee ballots include:

- Absentee ballots challenged by a poll watcher (Poll Watcher challenges must be made at the time the voter’s name and voting precinct are read aloud by the election official.);
- Absentee ballots cast by flagged voters (e.g. first-time voters who registered by mail and who did not provide identification when registering or voting absentee); and
- Absentee ballots delivered by a bearer/agent/administrator for which the name and address of the bearer/agent/administrator written by the county clerk on the return envelope does not match the information contained in the voter statement.

(See the next page for information on REJECTED ballots.)

When an absentee ballot becomes provisional, the absentee ballot clerk should:

- Place the absentee voter package (the return envelope and everything that is inside it) into a provisional voter envelope;
- Record on the provisional voter envelope the reason the absentee ballot was made provisional, including the reason the ballot was challenged, if any; and
- Set the provisional ballots aside for consideration by the election commission.

COUNTING ABSENTEE BALLOTS

After processing all the absentee ballots, the absentee ballot election officials shake the ballot box containing the inner “Ballot Only” envelopes thoroughly to mix the ballots.

When it is time to count the ballots, election officials must:

1. Open the inner “Ballot Only” envelopes;
2. Count any write-in votes first; and
3. Count the remaining ballots by hand or electronic tabulating device at the discretion of the election commission.

Absentee ballots on hand (and early votes) must be counted before the polls close on election day and the initial count reported to the Secretary of State no later than 30 minutes after the polls close. Processing of absentee ballots may not begin prior to 8:30 a.m. on election day.

Reject any ballot if:

- It comes in a bulk mailing from someone other than an administrator of a long-term care facility;
- No voter statement is found in the return envelope or the ballot envelope;
- If the election commission finds that the name, date of birth, address or signature on the voter statement do not compare to the corresponding information on the absentee ballot application;
- The absentee ballot was cast by a voter who dies before the polls open on election day if it is postmarked, delivered by a bearer, agent or administrator, or, in the case of an active duty “armed services” voter, executed *after* the date the voter died;
- If the return envelope indicates the ballot was returned by a bearer, agent or administrator but the voter has not authorized a bearer/agent/administrator on the voter statement.

BEST PRACTICE: If ballots are rejected by absentee ballot clerks in opening and processing, re-package all ballot-related materials (inner envelope, voter statement, etc.) in the outer return envelope, mark the envelope as rejected, state the reason for the rejection, and keep all rejected ballots in their envelopes in a separate, secure place until storage. The return envelope should not be sealed because it must remain available for public inspection.

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