

ABSENTEE CANVASSING QUICK GUIDE

OPENING AND PROCESSING ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Absentee ballots must be opened, processed and counted by election clerks **before** the polls close on election day. All absentee ballots must contain a form of photo ID to be considered a REGULAR ballot.

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, photo identification (or statement/form from the administrator of a long term/residential care facility) and the ballot (inner) envelope have been properly placed in the return envelope.
2. If the voter statement and ID (or statement/form from the administrator of a long term/residential care facility), 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 the name and precinct of the voter.
 - The election officials compare the name, address, dates 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 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 ID 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 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 and Addresses must match
- 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.
- If there is any doubt about the validity of a ballot, set it aside for the election commission to review.
- Absentee ballots that fail to contain a copy of a Photo ID will be considered Provisional Ballots.

PROVISIONAL ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Provisional absentee ballots include:

- Absentee ballots cast by voters who did not provide identification with their ballot
 - Commissioners will count the ballot if the **Verification of Identity Affirmation** section of the **Voter Statement** is signed by the voter and there is no other reason, unrelated to the ID requirement, to not count the ballot (ex: voter not registered or already voted, etc.)
- 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 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.

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

- Place 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 as soon as practical after the polls close. Processing of absentee ballot paperwork (outer envelope material) may begin up to 7 days before election day. Processing of ballot envelopes 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.