

DOUGLAS COUNTY ELECTIONS Community Outreach Plan: Signature Verification

Douglas County Elections' ongoing practices and pilot projects related to signature verification as an outreach topic.

2024
OUTREACH
PLANS

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SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION

In June 2024, RCW requirements were updated to require that election offices produce a document detailing how they inform the public about signature verification requirements. Douglas County Elections will update this document annually.

The following document outlines our office's current and ongoing practices, as well as several pilot projects occurring this year related to outreach about signature verification.

MATERIALS PREPARED IN SPANISH

The items listed below are part of the community outreach plan as defined in RCW 29A.60 and ESSB 5890 and will be translated into Spanish. This effort aims to ensure that all members of our community have access to important information and resources, regardless of their primary language.

- Signature Mismatch Cure Letter
- Signature Challenges information listed on our website

OVERVIEW OF REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS PROCESS

A voter's signature is a unique identifier used in vote-by-mail elections to verify identity.

Citizens may register to vote in Washington State via a paper registration form, the DOL, or online. For a registration to be valid, a signature is required. That signature is added to the voter's record in the statewide registration database, VoteWA. Each voter is given a unique voter identification number when they are registered.

VoteWA generates a ballot for all eligible voters for each election. The issues/races on a ballot itself are based on the voter's precinct, which is determined by their residential address. Along with the ballot, a postage-paid return envelope which the voter must sign is included. The envelope has a unique ballot ID number printed on it. If a voter requests a replacement ballot or moves during the voting window, a new ballot will be generated with its own unique ballot ID number.

After the voter receives their ballot packet, they vote the ballot and place it inside the secrecy sleeve, which goes inside the return envelope. They then sign the return envelope and return it to Douglas County Elections either through the mail or by depositing it in a ballot drop box.

SIGNATURE VERIFICATION PROCESS

On the ballot return envelope, there is a signature line that a voter must complete. The signature on the ballot envelope must match the signature on file in VoteWA for the envelope to be accepted and opened for ballot processing.

Upon initial receipt, ballot envelopes are manually scanned and matched to the voter record. The signature on the ballot is compared to the signature(s) in the voter's record. Employees who are trained in signature verification standards with training from the Office of the Secretary of State review each signature. Comparisons follow WAC 434-261-051, 052, and 053 guidelines.

Every signature is reviewed with the presumption that the signature on the ballot declaration is the voter's signature. A team of two employees must reach a consensus on whether a signature is approved or challenged. If they disagree, another team member assists in deciding. This includes a review of all previous signatures on file in VoteWA and a review of the voters in the household.

If the signature on the return envelope does not match the signature on file for the voter, the ballot is placed into a secure ballot closet and remains unopened. The envelope will only be opened when/if a cure form is returned that matches the signature on the ballot envelope.

SIGNATURE CURING PROCESS

In Douglas County, ensuring every eligible vote is counted is of utmost importance. When a signature discrepancy is identified, staff take steps to inform the voter and provide them with an opportunity to correct the issue. To facilitate this, voters are asked to provide a phone number and email address on their ballot envelope.

Step 1: Notification of Discrepancy: As soon as a signature discrepancy is detected, Douglas County Elections staff attempt to contact the voter. Multiple communication channels are utilized to ensure that the voter is aware of the issue as quickly as possible. This includes:

Mail: A physical letter along with a cure form is mailed within 24 hours of a challenge, explaining the discrepancy and the necessary steps to resolve it.

Step 2: Mailing Cure Forms: Every voter with a challenged signature receives a cure form (Appendix 2). This form is essential for the voter to update or confirm their signature. The cure form includes:

- A line for the voter to sign on.
- Clear instructions on how to fill out the form.
- A postage-paid return envelope.

Step 3: Receipt and Verification of Cure Forms: Once the voter returns the completed cure form, the signature on the form is compared to the signature on the ballot envelope. If the signatures match:

- The form is scanned and uploaded into VoteWA, adding the signature for all future elections.
- The ballot envelope is opened, and the secrecy sleeve containing the ballot is removed and shuffled with other ballots to maintain voter anonymity before tabulation.

Step 4: Processing and Deadlines: Cure forms must be received by 4:30 P.M. on the day before the certification of an election.

SECTION TWO:

CURRENT OUTREACH PRACTICES

CURE FORMS AND SIGNATURE UPDATE REQUEST FORMS

Douglas County Elections maintains two essential forms for voter interaction during election cycles: the cure form and the signature update request form (refer to Appendices 2 and 3).

These forms are available in physical form at our office and digitally on our website. Douglas County Elections encourages proactive engagement from voters, allowing them the option to update their signature voluntarily at any point.

The Douglas County Elections teams reviews voter signatures on an ongoing basis as voter maintenance best practice. As part of our routine database maintenance, staff identify voters with older signatures. As these signatures are identified a signature update notice is sent, requesting the voter provide an updated signature. The inclusion of more signatures, particularly recent ones, enhances the accuracy and integrity of the voter database.

VOTER PAMPHLET ADS

Douglas County Elections has been producing a Local Voters' Pamphlet (LVP) for every election since 2021. During Primary and General Elections, Douglas County Elections produces an LVP that is mailed to every household in Douglas County. One of the advertisements frequently included emphasizes the importance of signatures.

Your Signature Matters!

- Remember to sign and date the declaration on the return envelope with your name printed on it.
- We compare the signature on your ballot envelope with the signature on your voter registration. This is how we know the ballot comes from you.
- How do we get your signature? If you register or update using a paper registration form, we capture the signature on the form. If you register or update through the Department of Motor vehicles, we capture the signature from your Washington State Driver License.
- Do not sign for another registered voter.

2024 OUTREACH EVENTS

Douglas County Elections has multiple outreach events and projects for 2024. During these outreach events, voters will be educated about signature verification requirements and the importance of ballot signatures. These are:

NEW! VOTING CENTER LOCATION ON ELECTION NIGHT

Douglas County Elections will now be offering a voting center at the Law and Justice Center, 100 19th St NW, East Wenatchee, on Election Day. Please keep in mind this will only be available on Election Day, 8:30 am to 8:00 pm. You will be able to:

- Register to Vote
- Update your voter's registration
- Vote and return a ballot
- Get a replacement ballot
- Get a Voters' Pamphlet in Spanish or English.
- Accessible Voting Machine will be available for use
- Update signature

NORTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON FAIR – SIGNATURE VERIFICATION EDUCATION BOOTH

Douglas County Elections will have a booth at the Douglas County Fairgrounds, August 23, 2024 during the Douglas County Fair. This event is very popular in the community. Members of the community can ask questions about the election process and our best practices. Also, at our booth you have the chance to:

- Register to Vote
- Update you're your voter's registration
- Update Signature
- Cancel a Voter Registration/Deceased

DEMOCRAT AND REPUBLICAN PARTY – VOTER REGISTRATION/SIGNATURE VERIFICATION INFORMATION SEMINAR

Douglas County Elections offers a seminar to the Democrat and Republican parties. This is a free event that instructs members on the proper way to register an individual, how the election process works, and how to educate their voters about signature verification processes.

[WAC 434-261-053](#)

Ballot declaration signature cure process.

(1) If a ballot declaration signature is not accepted following secondary review, the voter used a mark or signature stamp but did not include witnesses, or if the ballot declaration was not signed, the ballot cannot be counted until the voter cures their signature. The voter identified on the ballot return envelope must be notified as soon as practicable, but no later than three business days following receipt, of the procedure for curing their signature by:

(a) A notice letter package sent by first class mail with a signature update form or a missing signature form. The forms must include the ballot declaration required by WAC [434-230-015](#). The notice letter package must also include a prepaid envelope in which to return a completed signature update or missing signature form. The notice letter must:

(i) Be in substantially the same form as the sample notice letter created by the secretary of state; and

(ii) Be available in all languages required by the Department of Justice.

(b) Phone (if the voter has provided a phone number);

(c) Text message (if the voter has opted into text message notifications); and

(d) Email (if the voter has provided an email address).

(2) The voter may cure their ballot signature no later than the close of business the day before the election is certified.

(3) A voter may cure a missing signature by:

(a) Returning a signed missing signature form. The signature on the form must be compared to the voter's signature in the voter registration record using the process described in WAC [434-261-052](#); or

(b) Appearing in person and signing the ballot declaration. The signature on the ballot declaration must be compared to the voter's signature in the voter registration record using the process described in WAC [434-261-052](#).

(4) A voter using a mark may cure a failure to have two witnesses attest to the ballot declaration signature by returning a missing signature form. The form must contain the voter's mark and the signatures of two witnesses.

(5) A voter may cure a nonmatching signature by either:

(a) Returning a signature update form or appearing in person and signing a new registration form.

(i) The signature on the form must be compared to the signature on the ballot declaration using the process described in WAC [434-261-052](#);

(ii) The signature on the form is saved as a new signature in the voter registration record for the current and future elections; or

(b) Providing valid secondary identity verification. The county auditor must verify the secondary identification is for the voter who signed the ballot declaration. Secondary identification may be:

(i) The last four digits of the voter's Social Security number or the voter's full driver's license number or state identity card number;

(ii) Photo identification, valid enrollment card of a federally recognized Indian tribe in Washington state, copy of a current utility bill or current bank statement, copy of a current government check, copy of a current paycheck, or a government document, other than a voter registration card, that shows both the name and address of the voter; or

(iii) A multifactor authentication code, from a system approved by the secretary of state, the county auditor sent to the voter's phone number or email address that has previously been provided by the voter.

If a voter successfully provides secondary identity verification and confirms, orally or in writing, that the voter in fact returned the ballot, the ballot must be accepted unless two persons who have received signature verification training under WAC [434-261-051](#)(7) conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that a person other than the voter signed the ballot declaration. This conclusion may be based on evidence including, but not limited to, other ballots in the same election bearing the same signature.

(6) If the registered voter asserts that the signature on the ballot declaration is not the voter's signature prior to 8:00 p.m. on election day, the voter may vote a provisional ballot.

(7) If the voter does not successfully cure their signature by close of business the day before certification of the election, the ballot must be sent to the canvassing board.

(8) A record must be kept of the process used to cure ballot envelopes with missing and mismatched signatures. The record must contain the date on which each voter was contacted, the notice was mailed, and the date on which each voter subsequently submitted a signature to cure the missing or mismatched signature.

[Statutory Authority: RCW [29A.04.611](#). WSR 24-07-018, § 434-261-053, filed 3/8/24, effective 5/4/24.]

APPENDIX 2. CURE FORM- SIGNATURE DOES NOT MATCH

Dear [REGISTRANT_FULL_NAME],

We want to make sure we count your vote. Take action!

We received your ballot for the [Election Name] Election. However, the signature on your return envelope does not match closely enough with the signature we have on your voter registration record.

To resolve this issue, complete the form included with this letter. The form you fill out must:

- include a signature that matches the signature on your returned ballot envelope, OR
- confirm that the ballot is yours by providing another proof of your identity, which can include one of the following:
 1. The last four digits of your Social Security number
 2. Your full Washington state driver's license number, driver's permit number or state identity card number
 3. Any of the alternate forms of identification listed. Provide a copy of **one** of the following:
 - valid photo identification
 - valid enrollment card of a federally recognized Indian tribe in Washington state;
 - copy of a current utility bill or current bank statement;
 - copy of a current government check;
 - copy of a current paycheck, or a government document (other than a voter registration card) showing the voter's name AND address.

Please complete and return the signature resolution form included no later than 4:30 p.m. Pacific Time, [day before certification]. Please sign the form as close as possible to the way you signed your ballot envelope to resolve the issue.

You can check the status of your ballot at www.VoteWA.gov. Please allow 3-5 business days for processing.

If you have questions about this letter, please contact Douglas County Elections at 509-888-6403.

Sincerely,
Douglas County Elections

1. Read the ballot declaration

Ballot declaration

I do solemnly swear or affirm under penalty of perjury that I am: A United States citizen; A Washington state resident that meets the requirements for voting mandated by state law; At least 18 years old on election day, or 17 years old at the primary and 18 years old by the day of the November general election; Voting only once in this election and not voting in any other United States jurisdiction; Not serving a sentence of total confinement under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections for a Washington felony conviction or currently incarcerated for a federal or out-of-state felony conviction; Not disqualified from voting due to a court order; and Aware it is illegal to forge a signature or cast another person's ballot and that attempting to vote when not qualified, attempting to vote more than once, or falsely signing this declaration is a felony punishable by a maximum imprisonment of five years, a maximum fine of \$10,000, or both.

Voter oath

I declare that the facts on this voter registration form are true. I am a citizen of the United States, I am a Washington state resident, and I am at least sixteen years old. I am not disqualified from voting due to a court order, and I am not currently serving a sentence of total confinement under the jurisdiction of the department of corrections for a Washington felony conviction, and I am not currently incarcerated for a federal or out-of-state felony conviction.

2a. Sign and date below (required)

By signing below or by providing another form of ID and returning this document you are confirming that you were the one who voted the ballot. All signatures below will be added to your voter registration record. Providing different versions of your signature can help avoid a similar issue in the future.

X _____ Today's Date ____/____/____

X _____ Today's Date ____/____/____

X _____ Today's Date ____/____/____

If you are unable to write your signature, make a mark in the signature area above. Have your mark witnessed and signed by two people below. You may not use power of attorney to sign for someone else.

_____ signature of witness 1 _____ signature of witness 2

2b. or provide another way to verify your identity:

Driver's license, driver's permit, or state ID number: _____

Last 4 of SSN: _____

See next side. [BALLOT_ID]

3. Provide your contact information (optional)

Please provide us with your contact information. This information is not public and would only be used by our office to contact you with questions about your voter registration or ballot.

Email: _____ Phone: _____

_____ I would like to receive text and email notifications about my ballot status in future elections.

4. Return this form so we can count your ballot

We must receive this completed form before the deadline to count your ballot. Here is how you can return it:

1. Email to elections@co.douglas.wa.us – take a clear photo or scan of the entire form.
2. Mail with the included return envelope – no stamp needed.
3. In person at Douglas County Elections – 213 S Rainier St, Waterville, WA.
4. Fax to (509) 745-8931.

We must receive this form **by 4:30 p.m. on [Day Before Certification]** to count your ballot.

