



## **Signature Verification Process**

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California Elections Code §3019 states when a vote-by-mail ballot is returned to the elections official, the signature on the identification return envelope shall be compared to either of the following to determine if the signature compares:

- 1) The signature appearing on the voter's affidavit of registration or any previous affidavit of registration of the voter (California Elections Code §3019(a)(1)(A)).
- 2) The signature appearing on a form issued by an elections official that contains the voter's signature and that is part of the voter's registration record (California Elections Code §3019(a)(1)(B)).

The following guidelines have been established by California Government Code §20960:

- a) For signature verification, the elections official must compare the signature on an initiative, referendum, recall, nominating petition or paper, signature in-lieu of filing fee, and any other petition or paper must be compared to the voter's signature(s) in the voter's registration record. In addition, the elections official must compare the signature on a voted vote-by-mail envelope and a voted provisional ballot envelope to the voter's signature(s) in the voter's registration record prior to counting a ballot.
- b) On initial review, elections officials shall seek to eliminate the visibility of identifying information. When comparing signatures, the elections official **shall not** review or consider a voter's party preference, race, or ethnicity.
- c) The comparison of a signature shall begin with the basic presumption that the signature on the petition, the vote-by-mail identification envelope, signature verification statement, unsigned ballot statement, or provisional ballot envelope is the voter's signature.
- d) Exact matches are not required for an elections official to confirm a valid signature. The fact that signatures share similar characteristics is sufficient to determine that a signature is valid.
- e) Similar characteristics between a signature being compared and any signature in the voter's registration record are sufficient to determine a signature is valid.
- f) In comparing the signatures, the elections official may consider the following characteristics when visually comparing a signature to determine whether the signatures are from the same signer:
  - 1) Slant of the signature.
  - 2) Signature is printed or in cursive.
  - 3) Size, proportions, or scale.
  - 4) Individual characteristics, such as how the "t's" are crossed, "i's" are dotted, or loops are made on the letters f, g, j, y, or z.
  - 5) Spacing between the letters within the first and/or last name and between first and last name.
  - 6) Line direction.
  - 7) Letter formations.
  - 8) Proportion or ratio of the letters in the signature.
  - 9) Initial strokes and connecting strokes of the signature.
  - 10) Similar endings such as an abrupt end, a long tail, or loop back around.
  - 11) Speed of the writing.
  - 12) Presence or absence of pen lifts.
  - 13) Misspelled names.

- g) In comparing signatures on a petition, vote-by-mail identification envelope, signature verification statement, unsigned ballot statement, or provisional ballot envelope, elections officials shall consider as explanations for the following discrepancies in signatures:
- 1) Evidence of trembling or shaking in a signature could be health-related or the result of aging.
  - 2) The voter may have used a shorthand of their full legal name, including, but not limited to the use of initials, or the rearrangement of components of their full legal name, such as a reversal of first and last names, use of a middle name in place of a first name, or omitting a second last name.
  - 3) The voter's signature style may have changed over time.
  - 4) The signature on the vote-by-mail identification envelope may have been written in haste.
  - 5) A signature in the voter's registration file may have been written with a stylus pen or other electronic signature tool that may result in a thick or fuzzy quality.
  - 6) The surface of the location where the signature was made may have been hard, soft, uneven, or unstable.
- h) In addition to the characteristics listed in subdivisions (f) and (g), the elections official may also consider factors applicable to a particular voter, such as the age of the voter, the age of the signature(s) contained in the voter's record, the possibility that the voter is disabled, the voter's primary language, and the quality of any digitized signature(s) contained in the voter's record.
- i) Only a signature possessing multiple, significant, and obvious differing characteristics with all signatures in the voter's registration record will be subject to additional review by the elections official.
- j) A signature that the initial reviewer identifies as possessing multiple, significant, and obvious distinctive differing characteristics from the signature(s) in the voter's registration record shall only be rejected if two different elections officials unanimously find beyond a reasonable doubt that the signature differs in multiple, significant, and obvious respects from all signatures in the voter's registration record.
- k) When evaluating signatures, elections officials may review using broad characteristics to evaluate an entire signature as a unit or they may narrow the scope of their examination to that of specific letters within a signature.
- l) A signature made using a mark, such as an "X", or made by a signature stamp is presumed valid and shall be accepted if it meets the requirements set forth in Elections Code section 354.5.

(California Code of Regulations Title 2 §20960)

The Kings County Elections Department has established the following procedures for signature verification on all returned vote-by-mail ballot return envelopes.

- 1) As ballot return envelopes are returned to the election's office, via USPS, courier delivery, drop box, in-person delivery, or by Vote Center staff, they will be separated out into batches. A tracking log indicating the date the ballots were received and delivery method will be created. This tracking log shall accompany the batch throughout the ballot verification process. Ballot return envelopes missing signatures will be segregated and checked in manually. A challenge letter will be mailed to these voters no less than 24 hours from initial receipt of the return envelope (California Election §3019 (7)(e)(1)(A)).
- 2) Batches will be scanned into the Election Management System via the following:
  - a. Open notepad on the workstation.
  - b. Scan the barcode on the return envelope for the entire batch. Do not mix the order of the return envelopes while scanning.
  - c. Save your notepad document in the following folder on the H Drive:  
H:\ELECTIONS xxxx (xxxx is the year of the election)\xxxx(xxxx is the month the election is held)\WANDA . Be sure it is saved in .txt format.
  - d. In the Election Management System do the following:
    - i. Go to "Miscellaneous" tab.
    - ii. Click on "Wanda".
    - iii. On the pop-up window do the following:
      1. Click on the "AV Ballot Returned (Voted)" radio button (left side of screen).
      2. Under AV Return Date section:
        - a. For Date, use the date the tracking log was stamped.
        - b. For return source, select what applies:
          - i. Drop Box – ballots returned at the drop box locations.
          - ii. Drop Off Location – ballots returned to the ballot box inside the office.
          - iii. Vote Center Drop Off – ballots returned to the Vote Center.
          - iv. Mail – ballots returned via USPS.
          - v. Fax – UOCAVA Ballots faxed back to the office.
        - c. Change "Challenge Code" to "IN REVIEW".
        - d. Make sure the "Marked as Verified" box is checked.
      3. Under Source:
        - a. click on the "Process File Only (no Upload)" radio button.
        - b. Click on the "Locate File" button and select the .txt file that you saved at step 2c.

4. Click on the “Data Upload” button. The file will process and generate a “Wanda Upload” report.
  5. Print out a copy of the upload report and staple it to the tracking log. If there are any challenged ballots indicated on the report, print out two copies of the upload report. Attach one to the tracking log. Find the ballot(s) indicated on the report and secure them together with the report. These ballots will go into the WANDA Challenged bucket located in the vault for further review. Stamp the date you performed the uploading process into the Election Management System on the tracking log in the appropriate space.
- 3) Signature Verification of batches will be done in the following manner:
- a. In the Election Management System, navigate to the Elections tab.
  - b. Highlight “Absentee Voter / VBM Ballots” from the drop down.
  - c. Click on “Pick AV/VBM Batch”.
  - d. A window will pop up asking you to verify the election you are working on. Make sure the current election is selected. If not, use the drop-down menu to select the appropriate election.
  - e. A new window will pop open showing the election name and batch number. Using the tracking log, locate the Wanda Upload report and find the batch number located on the top of the report. Select the batch number from the drop down and press the “View Batch” button.
  - f. Click the “no” option on the pop up that appears.
  - g. The system will open the Signature Verification Module and load signatures on file for the voters in the order the return envelopes were scanned. Keeping in mind the established guidelines from California Government Code §20960 (noted on pages 1 and 2 of this document), make the determination if the signature shown matches the return envelope. Double clicking on an image of a signature will enlarge it and pull up additional signatures, if any, in the voter’s file. If a match can be determined by any signature in the voter file, we can accept the ballot.
  - h. Once you get to the last page of signatures, a pop up will inform you that “you are at the end of the batch”. Once done verifying the last of the signatures, press the “Close Batch” button. A new pop up will ask you to remove the “In Review” challenge. Press the “Yes” button. Be sure to stamp the date you completed the signature verification process on the tracking log in the appropriate space.
  - i. Move the verified batch back to the vault and place on the shelf labeled “Ready to be Opened”.
- 4) If a signature cannot be verified, the return envelope in question will be processed in the following manner:
- a. If a return envelope that is missing / has no signature makes it into a batch,

- i. The elections official verifying signatures will scan the entirety of the return envelope to ensure the signature was not placed in the wrong section of the envelope (witness line, relationship lines, etc.).
  - ii. After verifying there is no signature present, the challenge code shall be changed from “IN REVIEW” to “NO VOTER SIGNATURE” in the signature verification module of Election Management System. The words “No Sig” or “No Signature” shall be written on the back of the return envelope, and the back of the return envelope shall be initialed by the verifier.
  - iii. Except as provided in clause (iv), or before the next business day after discovering that a voter has failed to sign the identification envelope, but not later than eight days prior to the certification of the election, the elections official shall send by first-class mail notice and instructions to the voter of the opportunity to provide a signature no later than 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election. The notice shall include a return envelope, with postage paid, for the voter to return the unsigned identification envelope statement. (California Elections Code §3019 (7)(e)(1)(A)(B)(i)).
  - iv. If it is impracticable under the circumstances for the elections official to send the notice described in clause (i) on or before the next business day, including in the event of technological failure, the elections official shall send the notice as soon as practicable, but not later than eight days prior to the certification of the election (California Elections Code §3019 (7)(e)(1)(A)(B)(iv)).
  - v. Once the letter has been sent, the return envelope shall be placed into the accordion style folder located in the vault until the “Unsigned Ballot Envelope Statement” has been returned or the required retention period has passed.
- b. If upon conducting the comparison of signatures pursuant to subdivision (a) the elections official determines that the signature possesses multiple, significant, and obvious differing characteristics when compared to all signatures in the voter’s registration record, the signature is subject to the additional procedures described in paragraph (2) (California Elections Code §3019(2)(c)(1)).
- i. If the elections official makes the determination described in paragraph (1), the signature shall be rejected only if two additional elections officials each find beyond a reasonable doubt that the signature differs in multiple, significant, and obvious respects from all signatures in the voter’s registration record. If the officials determine that the signatures do not compare, the identification envelope shall not be opened and the ballot shall not be counted. The elections official shall write the cause of the rejection on the face of the identification envelope only after completing the procedures

- described in subdivision (d) (California Elections Code §3019(2)(c)(2)).
- ii. In the event the signature is rejected, a screen shot of all signatures in the voter's profile will be made, printed, and attached to the return envelope. This includes any attachments that may be in the voter's profile.
  - iii. The challenge code in the "Signature Verification Module" will be changed from "IN REVIEW" to "NON-MATCHING SIGNATURE". The words "Mis-sig" or "non-matching sig" shall be written on the back of the return envelope along with the initials of the three verifying elections officials along with the reason as to why the signature was rejected pursuant to California Elections Code §3019(2)(c)(2).
  - iv. The return envelope and screenshots shall be presented to the ROV who will make a final determination of a signature's validity.
  - v. Upon final determination the signature is rejected, a "Signature Verification Statement" shall be mailed to the address on file of the voter
  - vi. Except as provided in subparagraph (D), on or before the next business day after a determination that a voter's signature does not compare pursuant to subdivision (c), but not later than eight days prior to the certification of the election, the elections official shall send by first-class mail notice to the voter of the opportunity to verify the voter's signature no later than 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election. The notice shall include a return envelope, with postage paid, for the voter to return a signature verification statement (California Elections Code §3019(2)(d)(1)(A))
  - vii. If it is impracticable under the circumstances for the elections official to send the notice described in subparagraph (A) on or before the next business day, including in the event of technological failure, the elections official shall send the notice as soon as practicable, but not later than eight days prior to the certification of the election (California Elections Code §3019(2)(d)(1)(D)).
- c. In the event the Unsigned Ballot or Signature Verification statement is returned to the Elections Office, the following shall occur:
- i. If the letter returned is an "Unsigned Ballot" statement, the signature on the letter shall be compared with the signatures in the voter's profile.
  - ii. If the signature on the statement does not match with the signatures in the voter's profile, the same procedures as a non-matching return envelope will be followed. The letter shall be scanned and attached to the voter's profile. The letter will also be attached to the physical return envelope for the required retention period. Once the

- determination has been made that the signature does not match, a “Signature Verification” statement shall be mailed to the address on file for the voter and the return envelope shall be placed into the accordion style folder located in the elections vault until the Signature Verification Statement has been returned or the required retention period has passed.
- iii. If the signature does match, the challenge code will be removed from the election management system and the return envelope shall be placed on the shelf labeled “Ready to be Opened” in the vault. The statement shall be attached to the physical return envelope for the required retention period.
  - d. If the letter returned is a “Signature Verification” statement, the signature on the letter shall be compared with the signatures in the voter’s profile.
    - i. If the signature still does not match, the letter shall be scanned and attached to the voter’s profile. The letter will then be attached to the physical return envelope and shall be placed back into the accordion style folder located in the elections vault until the required retention period has passed. The ballot will not be counted.
    - ii. If the signature does match, the challenge code will be removed from the election management system and the return envelope shall be placed on the shelf labeled “Ready to be Opened” in the vault. The statement shall be attached to the physical return envelope for the required retention period.