

**WAC 434-250-120 Verification of the signature and return date.**

(1) A ballot shall be counted if:

(a) The voter has not already cast a ballot that has been accepted in the election;

(b) The voter signed the ballot declaration with a valid signature, as determined by WAC 434-261-051 through 434-261-053, or the voter has provided identification at a voting center; and

(c) The envelope is returned in one of the following methods:

(i) The envelope is postmarked not later than the day of the election and received not later than close of business the day before certification of the election. A postmark is any official mark, imprint, or application that verifies when a ballot entered the U.S. postal system. The mailing date of a ballot sent through a commercial mailing service, such as FedEx or UPS, may be considered a postmark. The postmark on the envelope is the official date of mailing. If there are multiple postmarks, the earliest postmark is the date of mailing. A hand cancellation by an agent of the U.S. Postal Service is a postmark.

If the postmark is illegible or missing, the date of the voter's signature is the date of mailing as per RCW 29A.40.110. If the postmark is illegible or missing and the voter did not include a date with their signature, county auditors may use available U.S. Postal Service tools to verify the date of mailing;

(ii) The ballot is deposited in a ballot drop box no later than 8:00 p.m. on election day; or

(iii) For service and overseas voters, the ballot is received by fax or email no later than 8:00 p.m. on election day. Only service and overseas voters can submit ballots by fax or email.

(2) Postage that includes a date, such as meter postage or a dated stamp, does not qualify as a postmark. If an envelope lacks a postmark or if the postmark is unreadable, the date to which the voter has attested on the ballot declaration determines the validity of the ballot, per RCW 29A.40.110. If a ballot is from a service or overseas voter, the date to which the voter has attested on the ballot declaration determines the validity of the ballot, per RCW 29A.40.100.

(3) Consistent with WAC 434-250-080, the voter's current ballot and signed declaration shall be accepted for initial processing; ballots previously or subsequently received for the same voter are not counted nor rejected by the county canvassing board. Such ballots are invalid and categorized as informational only.

(a) If the first ballot received is identical to the voter's current ballot because the voter submitted a replacement ballot, the replacement ballot shall be referred to signature verification for initial processing.

(b) If the first ballot received is suspended because of a voter registration update, the suspended ballot shall be held by the county of current registration. The county of registration may choose to manually check the suspended ballot for signature issues and send a signature update form, while allowing time for the current ballot to be received and accepted.

(4) A ballot may not be rejected merely because the ballot envelope is not dated, unless the date is necessary to validate the timeliness of the ballot. The signature on a ballot declaration may not be rejected merely because the name in the signature is a variation of the name on the voter registration record.

(5) Only service and overseas voters are eligible to return a ballot by fax or email. For ballots returned by fax or email from

service or overseas voters, the county auditor must apply procedures to protect the secrecy of the ballot.

(a) If returned by email, the county auditor must print the email and attachments; the printed email and signed declaration page must be processed and retained like other ballot declarations, and the printed ballot must be processed and retained like other ballots. The electronic versions of the email, ballot declaration, and ballot are exempt from public disclosure in order to maintain secrecy of the ballot. Voted service and overseas ballots returned by email may be returned with multiple attachments or in multiple emails.

(b) Service and overseas ballots returned by fax or email with a missing or mismatched signature are processed as established in RCW 29A.60.165 and WAC 434-261-050.

(6) For faxed or emailed ballots received from voters who are not service or overseas voters the county auditor must:

(a) Contact the voter immediately if a faxed or emailed ballot is received to notify the voter that they must return their ballot by mail or ballot drop box.

(b) Count only the ballot received by mail or ballot drop box if the voter returns both a faxed or emailed ballot and a ballot by mail or ballot drop box.

(c) Send the faxed or emailed ballot to the canvassing board for rejection if the voter did not return a ballot by mail or ballot drop box.

(7) The signature verification process shall be open to the public, subject to reasonable procedures adopted and promulgated by the canvassing board to ensure that order is maintained and to safeguard the integrity of the process.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611. WSR 24-07-018, § 434-250-120, filed 3/8/24, effective 5/4/24; WSR 20-14-035, § 434-250-120, filed 6/24/20, effective 7/25/20; WSR 19-12-115, § 434-250-120, filed 6/5/19, effective 7/6/19; WSR 19-05-041, § 434-250-120, filed 2/14/19, effective 3/17/19; WSR 18-10-003, § 434-250-120, filed 4/19/18, effective 5/20/18; WSR 14-06-040, § 434-250-120, filed 2/26/14, effective 3/29/14; WSR 12-14-074, § 434-250-120, filed 7/2/12, effective 8/2/12. Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611, 29A.04.620, and 29A.04.630. WSR 11-24-064, § 434-250-120, filed 12/6/11, effective 1/6/12. Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611, 29A.08.420, 29A.24.131, 29A.40.110, 29A.46.020, and 29A.80.041. WSR 10-14-091, § 434-250-120, filed 7/6/10, effective 8/6/10. Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611, 29A.04.530. WSR 06-02-028, § 434-250-120, filed 12/28/05, effective 1/28/06. Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611. WSR 05-17-145, § 434-250-120, filed 8/19/05, effective 9/19/05.]