

# Community Outreach Plan: Signature Verification



**Auditor**



**Elections  
Division**

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# SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION

In June 2024, Revised Code of Washington (RCW) requirements were updated to require that election offices produce a document detailing how they inform the public about signature verification requirements. The Benton County Elections Division will update this document annually.

The following document outlines the Elections Division current and ongoing practices, as well as several pilot projects occurring this year related to outreach about signature verification.

## OVERVIEW OF REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS PROCESS

Citizens may register to vote in Washington State on a paper registration form, online at [VoteWA.gov](http://VoteWA.gov), or at a state agency. For a registration to be complete, 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 register, and their signature is a unique identifier used in Vote-By-Mail elections to verify identity.

VoteWA generates a ballot for all eligible voters for each election. The contest(s) and/or measure(s) on the ballot are based on the voter's precinct, which is determined by their residential address. Along with the ballot, a postage-paid ballot return envelope which the voter must sign is included. The ballot return envelope has a unique ballot identification number printed on it. If a voter is issued an additional ballot (replacement or reissued), the new ballot will be generated with its own unique ballot identification number.

After the voter receives their ballot packet, they vote the ballot and place it inside the secrecy sleeve, which goes inside the ballot return envelope. They then sign the ballot return envelope and return it to the Elections Division either by:

- Depositing the ballot in an Official Ballot Drop Box<sup>1</sup> (By 8:00 pm on Election Day), or
- Mail the ballot (Postmarked no later than Election Day and arrive the day before Certification Day)

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1

## 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 processed through a mail sorter, which captures an image of the front side of the return envelope, including the signature, unique ballot ID, and date.

Following this, trained Elections Division staff work to compare the signature on the return envelope against the voter's signature on file in VoteWA. All staff verifying signatures are trained and attend annual training with the Washington State Patrol provided by the Office of the Secretary of State. If staff does not see similarities in the signatures, or the signature is missing on the return envelope, the return envelope is challenged.

Every signature is reviewed with the presumption that the signature on the ballot declaration is the voter's signature.

If the first level review staff decides the signature does not match, they challenge the ballot. Signatures that are challenged must undergo a second review, which is done by staff with higher-level permissions and experience. This includes a review of all previous signatures on file in VoteWA and a review of the voters in the household. Once our second level review staff determine that the ballot envelope should remain challenged, they begin the cure process.

All challenged return envelopes are kept in secure storage and remain unopened.

- If the signature on the return envelope does not match the signature on file for the voter, the envelope will only be opened when/if a cure form is returned that matches the signature on the return envelope.
- If the signature is missing on the return envelope, the envelope will be opened when/if a cure form is returned that matches the signature(s) in their voter registration record.
- If the ballot is not returned on time, it will be rejected. There is no opportunity for the voter to cure a ballot that is returned late.

## SIGNATURE CURING PROCESS<sup>2</sup>

In Benton 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

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2

to provide a phone number and email address on their return envelope. If the voter provides a new phone or email, election staff will use that additional information to contact them.

**Step 1: Notification of Discrepancy:** The Elections Division staff prints and mails a signature cure form as soon as the signature is challenged. Multiple communication methods are utilized to ensure that the voter is aware of the issue as quickly as possible. This includes:

- **Phone Calls:** Benton County ensures that direct phone calls are made to voters whose signatures have been challenged. If the voter does not answer, a voicemail is left detailing the steps needed to cure their ballot envelope.<sup>3</sup>
- **Emails:** For voters who have provided an email address, an email notification is sent outlining the discrepancy and instructions for curing their ballot envelope.<sup>4</sup>
- **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 A Cure Form:** Every voter with a challenged signature receives a cure form<sup>5</sup>. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 3

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 4

<sup>5</sup> Appendix 5

## SECTION 2

### CURRENT OUTREACH PRACTICES

#### CURE FORMS AND SIGNATURE UPDATE REQUEST FORMS

The Elections Division maintains two essential forms for voter interaction during election cycles: the cure form and the signature update request form.

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

The Elections Division teams review voter signatures on an ongoing basis as a voter maintenance best practice. As part of our 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.

Additionally, Benton County Elections has been proactive in ensuring language accessibility by offering cure letters and signature update forms in Spanish. Recognizing the diverse linguistic needs of our community, a priority is placed on facilitating communication in multiple languages.

#### CONTACTING VOTERS

As part of our ongoing commitment to enhancing the signature cure process and ensuring the integrity of the voting process, the Elections Division currently has the following communication with voters who have rejected signatures.

- 1) **Prior To Certification Week**, staff take action by personally calling voters of a signature rejection and follow a guiding script. If a new phone number is provided on the return envelope, staff use that number to contact the voter. This proactive approach promptly informs voters about the challenge, makes them aware of the cure letter, and provides a more personalized interaction. During these calls, staff relay the reasons for the rejection and the ways a voter can cure their return envelope by using the online or email cure options if a voter does not want to wait for the letter.
- 2) **After Certification Week**, staff take additional action by mailing voters a notice of a signature rejection.

#### REDESIGNED CURE FORMS

As part of our comprehensive initiative to enhance the cure process and improve communication with voters, the Elections Division has focused on redesigning the cure form. While the Washington Secretary of State provides a generic template for each county to use, the Benton County Elections Division recognized an opportunity to personalize this crucial communication tool. The inclusion of Spanish translations was twofold: to enhance the clarity and impact of signature challenge letters and to foster greater engagement and responsiveness among voters.

## YOUR SIGNATURE MATTERS CAMPAIGN

The Elections Division produces a Local Voters' Pamphlet (LVP) for every Special and Primary Election. Then partners with the Office of Secretary of State for the General Election Voters' Pamphlet.

Figure 1: Graphic.

One of the advertisements frequently included in Voters' Pamphlets that emphasizes the importance of signatures.

Benton County Elections Division employees are trained in signature verification. They compare your signature on the return envelope to the signature we have on file for you. To check the status of your ballot go to [www.VoteWA.gov](http://www.VoteWA.gov)



Sometimes signatures change. If that's the case, don't worry! We will send you a form to update your signature. If we have contact information on file for you, we will also call text and email you to remind you to return your form.

Need a reminder of what signature we have for you? Take a look at your Driver's License. Many people register to vote when they apply/renew their Driver's License, so that is the signature we would have on file for you.



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## SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Content created by the Benton County Elections Division is posted around election season specifically related to educating voters about the signature verification process. Two examples

Figure 1: Graphic.

The text reads "Your Signature Matters" and is accompanied by a breakdown of what signature we might have on file for the voter.



Sometimes signatures change. If that's the case, don't worry! We will send you a form to update your signature. If we have a phone number on file for you, we will also call you to remind you to return your form.

*Need a reminder?* Take a look at your Driver's License. Many people register to vote when they apply/renew their Driver's License, so that is the signature we would have on file for you. Benton County Elections Division employees are trained in signature verification. They compare your signature on the return envelope to the signature we have on file for you. To check the status of your ballot go to [www.VoteWA.gov](http://www.VoteWA.gov)

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are below.



This envelope must be personalized or returned on or before Election Day or it will not be counted. Secure ballot drop boxes close at 6:00 pm on Election Day.  
Don't forget to sign the declaration below.

Signatures  
Name  
Address  
City  
State  
Zip

**WAS YOUR Signature CHALLENGED?**

**BENTON COUNTY WA**  
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Figure 2: Graphic.

The text reads "Was your signature challenged?" It is accompanied by two graphics: an alert symbol in front of a return envelope.

## 2024 OUTREACH PROJECTS

The Elections Division has a couple Outreach Projects for 2024, some of which have been or will be implemented within the calendar year. These are:

**1. Your Signature Matters Campaign**

The Elections Division will create and distribute the “Your Signature Matters” flyers to local organizations that want to conduct a voter registration drive. The flyer will also be distributed to local media contacts and available at the Voting Center.

**2. Social Media**

Content created by the Elections Division is posted on the Benton County Auditor Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube pages around election season specifically related to educating voters about the signature verification process.

**3. Media Outreach**

Designed and implemented voter outreach campaigns with NCM and Spotted Fox Digital for distribution in both English and Spanish audio.

**4. End Of Project Reports**

Upon completion of the canvassing and data gathering, a report about the project will be written.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: OFFICIAL BALLOT DROP BOX LOCATIONS

Name	Address	City	Zip	Drive Up Drop Box?	Open Days Before Election
Prosser Courthouse	620 Market St.	Prosser	99350	No	20
Benton City City Hall	1009 Dale Ave.	Benton City	99320	No	20
Kennewick City Hall	524 S. Auburn St.	Kennewick	99336	Yes	20
Finley Middle School	37208 S. Finley Rd.	Kennewick	99337	Yes	20
Benton County Campus	7122 W. Okanogan Pl.	Kennewick	99336	Yes	20
Benton County Elections Center	7122 W. Okanogan Pl. Bldg. F	Kennewick	99352	No	20
Badger Mountain Community Park	Keene Rd.	Richland	99352	Yes	20
Jefferson Park Drop Box	Symons St.	Richland	99352	Yes	20
West Richland Library Drop Box	3803 W. Van Giesen St.	West Richland	99353	Yes	20
West Richland Municipal Services Facility Bldg Drop Box	3100 Belmont Blvd.	West Richland	99353	Yes	20
WSU-Tri Cities Drop Box	2770 Crimson Way	Richland	99354	Yes	20

## APPENDIX 2: 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, that the signature on the ballot declaration does not match the signature(s) in the voter registration record. The county must notify the voter 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 form 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) Telephone, leaving a voicemail if the voter does not answer and voicemail is available (if the voter has provided a phone number);

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

(d) Email, enclosing a copy of the signature cure form (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.

If the voter has not responded to the signature cure notice by five business days before the final meeting of the canvassing board, the county auditor must attempt to notify the voter by:

(a) Telephone, leaving a voicemail if the voter does not answer and voicemail is available (if the voter has provided a phone number);

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

(c) Email, enclosing a copy of the signature cure form (if the voter has provided an email address).

(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 signature(s) 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 signature(s) in the voter registration record using the process described in WAC [434-261-052](#).

(4) A voter using a mark or signature stamp 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 or signature stamp 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, instruction permit, or state identicard 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\(8\)](#) 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 be provided the opportunity to vote a replacement 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 24-12-087, § 434-261-053, filed 6/5/24, effective 7/6/24; WSR 24-07-018, § 434-261-053, filed 3/8/24, effective 5/4/24.]

## APPENDIX 3: PHONE SCRIPT FOR SIGNATURE CHALLENGES

### No Signature Script

Hello [Voter's Name]

The reason for my call today is that the Benton County Elections Division received your ballot for the \_\_\_\_\_, but unfortunately, there was no signature on the return envelope.

To resolve the issue, they sent out a letter requesting a signature, and this is a courtesy call to let you know the letter is due back in their office on or before 4:30pm on \_\_\_\_\_. Once they receive your signature letter, they can process your ballot and update your signature on file.

If you have any questions, I'd be happy to forward you on to the Elections Division.

### Signature Discrepancy Script

Hello [Voter's Name]

The reason for my call today is that the Benton County Elections Division received your ballot for the \_\_\_\_\_, but unfortunately, the signature on the return envelope didn't match what they have on file for you.

To resolve the issue, they sent out a letter requesting an updated signature, and this is a courtesy call to let you know the letter is due back in their office on or before 4:30pm on \_\_\_\_\_. Once they receive your signature letter, they can process your ballot and update your signature on file.

If you have any questions, I'd be happy to forward your call on to the Elections Division.

## APPENDIX 4: EMAIL SCRIPT FOR SIGNATURE CHALLENGES

This e-mail is a reminder that the Benton County Elections Division received your ballot for the March 12, Presidential Primary, but unfortunately the signature that we have on file for you did not match what was signed on the return envelope.

To resolve the issue, we sent out a letter requesting a signature and this is a courtesy e-mail to let you know the letter is due back in their office on or before 4:30pm on Thursday, March 21st. Once we receive your signature letter they can process your ballot and update your signature on file.

For your convenience, I am attaching a blank copy of the cure notice that was sent out. Please write your name and address on the top portion of the letter so we can easily identify you. Please feel free to e-mail the completed form back to this e-mail address.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our office.





División Electoral del Condado de Benton

## Formulario de Actualización de Firma



La firma en el sobre de su boleta no coincide con su inscripción electoral. Por favor completa y entregue este formulario. Su firma en el formulario debe coincidir con la firma en el sobre de su boleta original para que su boleta cuente

### instrucciones

- Completa este formulario usando un bolígrafo negro o azul.
- Escoja la manera en que entregará el formulario.

### para más información

teléfono: 509-736-3085  
email: [elections@co.benton.wa.us](mailto:elections@co.benton.wa.us)

La firma que proporcione se añadirá a su registro de votante.

### cómo entregar este formulario

#### opción 1: por correo

use el sobre con franqueo pagado que viene incluido

#### opción 2: electrónicamente

email: [elections@co.benton.wa.us](mailto:elections@co.benton.wa.us)

#### opción 3: en persona

División Electoral del Condado de Benton  
2618 N Columbia Center Blvd.  
Richland, WA 99352

### declaración en la boleta

Yo solemnemente juro o afirmo bajo penalidad de perjurio que soy: Ciudadano de los Estados Unidos; Residente del estado de Washington que cumple con los requisitos para votar exigidos por la ley estatal; Tendré por lo menos 18 años de edad el día de las elecciones, o 17 años de edad en las primarias y 18 años de edad el día de las elecciones generales de noviembre; Votaré una sola vez en estas elecciones y no votaré en cualquier otra jurisdicción de los Estados Unidos; No estoy cumpliendo una sentencia de confinamiento total bajo la jurisdicción del Departamento Correccional debido a una condena por delito grave (felonía) en Washington ni estoy encarcelado actualmente por un delito grave en otro tribunal estatal o federal; No estoy descalificado para votar debido a una orden judicial; y Consciente de que es ilegal falsificar una firma o emitir una boleta de otra persona y que intentar votar cuando no es elegible, intentar votar más de una vez, o falsificar la firma de esta declaración es un delito grave castigable por un máximo de cinco años de encarcelamiento, un máximo de \$10,000 de multa, o ambos.

### declaración de la inscripción electoral

Declaro que la información en este formulario de inscripción electoral es verdadera. Soy ciudadano de Estados Unidos, he vivido en este domicilio en Washington por lo menos treinta días inmediatamente antes de las próximas elecciones en las que votaré y tengo al menos dieciséis años. No estoy descalificado para votar debido a una orden judicial, ni estoy cumpliendo una sentencia de encarcelamiento total bajo la jurisdicción del departamento correccional debido a una condena por delito grave (felonía) en Washington, ni estoy encarcelado actualmente por un delito grave en otro tribunal estatal o federal.

### firma y fecha

El poder notarial no se puede usar para firmar por otra persona

\_\_\_\_\_

firma del votante (requerida) fecha

\_\_\_\_\_

por favor escriba su nombre aquí

### si no puede firmar

En presencia de 2 testigos, intente hacer una marca en el área de la firma del votante. Los testigos deben firmar a continuación.

\_\_\_\_\_

firma del testigo 1 fecha

\_\_\_\_\_

firma del testigo 2

fecha

English on reverse





División Electoral del Condado de Benton

## Formulario por Falta de Firma



### Le faltó información requerida al sobre de su boleta.

Por favor firme y devuelva este formulario para que su boleta cuente.

#### instrucciones

- Completa este formulario usando un bolígrafo negro o azul.
- Escoja la manera en que entregará el formulario.

#### para más información

teléfono: 509-736-3085

email: [elections@co.benton.wa.us](mailto:elections@co.benton.wa.us)

#### cómo entregar este formulario

##### opción 1: por correo

use el sobre con franqueo pagado que viene incluido

##### opción 2: electrónicamente

email:

[elections@co.benton.wa.us](mailto:elections@co.benton.wa.us)

##### opción 3: en persona

División Electoral del Condado de Benton  
2618 N Columbia Center Blvd  
Richland, WA 99352

#### declaración en la boleta

Yo solemnemente juro o afirmo bajo penalidad de perjurio que soy: Ciudadano de los Estados Unidos; Residente del estado de Washington que cumple con los requisitos para votar exigidos por la ley estatal; Tendré por lo menos 18 años de edad el día de las elecciones, o 17 años de edad en las primarias y 18 años de edad el día de las elecciones generales de noviembre; Votaré una sola vez en estas elecciones y no votaré en cualquier otra jurisdicción de los Estados Unidos; No estoy cumpliendo una sentencia de confinamiento total bajo la jurisdicción del Departamento Correccional debido a una condena por delito grave (felonía) en Washington ni estoy encarcelado actualmente por un delito grave en otro tribunal estatal o federal; No estoy descalificado para votar debido a una orden judicial; y Consciente de que es ilegal falsificar una firma o emitir una boleta de otra persona y que intentar votar cuando no es elegible, intentar votar más de una vez, o falsificar la firma de esta declaración es un delito grave castigable por un máximo de cinco años de encarcelamiento, un máximo de \$10,000 de multa, o ambos.

#### firma y fecha

El poder notarial no se puede usar para firmar por otra persona

\_\_\_\_\_

firma del votante (requerida)

\_\_\_\_\_

fecha

\_\_\_\_\_

por favor escriba su nombre aquí

#### si no puede firmar

En presencia de 2 testigos, intente hacer una marca en el área de la firma del votante. Los testigos deben firmar a continuación.

\_\_\_\_\_

firma del testigo 1

\_\_\_\_\_

fecha

\_\_\_\_\_

firma del testigo 2

\_\_\_\_\_

fecha

english on reverse