Processing Replacement, Reissued, and Suspended Ballots

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This clearinghouse notice summarizes state laws and rules ensuring every eligible voter has only one ballot counted in an election.

Processing Returned Ballots

Replacement Ballots

A replacement ballot is issued when a new ballot is required by the voter and there are no changes to the voter's precinct. Accept and process whichever ballot you received first, even if it is not the current ballot; there is no need to delay processing. (WAC <u>434-250-080</u>, <u>434-250-120(3)(a)</u>)

Reissued Ballots

The voter changed their address and precinct. The ballot was reissued after the voter's original ballot was suspended.

- Determine if a returned ballot is current or suspended.
- If you received the current ballot, accept and process immediately.
- If you received a suspended ballot before the current ballot, hold until seven (7) days after Election Day.
 - If the current ballot does not arrive by seven (7) days after Election Day, follow "Processing Suspended Ballots."

Processing Suspended Ballots

See Clearinghouse Notice <u>Voter Registration Updates</u> for more information about the special handling of issued ballots.

Suspended means any ballot that is not the current ballot. The ballot becomes suspended when the voter registration record is updated or a replacement is requested, resulting in the issuance of a new current ballot. There may be multiple suspended ballots per voter. (\underline{WAC} $\underline{434-324-005(21)}$)

If a suspended ballot is received from a voter who is no longer registered in the county, the ballot must be mailed to the voter's new county as soon as possible. The county of registration holds suspended ballots while awaiting the arrival of current ballots. (WAC 434-250-110(3)(b)(ii))

A suspended ballot is accepted and processed when the current ballot is not received by seven (7) days after Election Day. The suspended ballot is then duplicated on a ballot of the voter's

current ballot style so only the offices and measures applicable to the voter's current address may be counted, even if the two precincts share no common offices or measures. In the case of replacement ballots, the first valid ballot received (suspended or current) is processed and counted. (WAC 434-250-080, 434-250-110(3)(c)(ii), 434-250-120(3)(a))

Suspended Ballot Signature Verification

The county of registration should manually check the suspended ballot for signature issues and send a cure form while allowing time for the current ballot to be received and accepted. (WAC 434-250-120(3), 434-261-051 – 434-261-053)

A signature cure form received for a suspended ballot may also be applied to a current ballot with a signature issue.

Informational Ballots

When a voter's ballot has been accepted, all other suspended ballots are considered informational or invalid. The County Canvassing Board should not reject these ballots, nor should they be included on the reconciliation form as rejected ballots. (WAC 434-250-080(4))

If all ballots received from a voter have unresolved challenges and cannot be accepted, only the current ballot should be referred to the County Canvassing Board. All other ballots are informational or invalid.

Additional Resources

See the attached glossary of terms for a quick reference to items covered in this clearinghouse notice.

Glossary

Accepted Ballot: The voter's ballot has been entered into the system and signature verified. Once accepted, the ballot cannot be suspended, and a new ballot cannot be issued; the voter has been credited with voting. It's ready for opening and manual inspection.

Note: In some counties with sorters, ballots may enter the system (received) but are not yet signature verified (accepted/challenged). In other counties, ballots are both received and accepted/challenged during signature verification.

Challenged Ballot: A ballot that has reached signature verification but is not accepted.

Conditional Registration: An in-person voter registration application submitted when the voter registration system is unable to process applications.

Conditionally registered voters are issued a ballot for their current address whenever possible. They are not issued a provisional ballot.

Current Ballot: The ballot issued for the voter's current address. It matches the ballot type or style and precinct assigned to the voter's residential address. Each voter can only have one current ballot. The current ballot may be a replacement or reissued ballot.

Held/Hold Ballot: A suspended ballot is received and "held" when time is needed to allow the voter to return their current ballot.

Informational/Invalid Ballot: When one ballot has been accepted, the other suspended ballots are now considered "informational" or 'invalid". These ballots are not rejected by the canvassing board.

Received Ballot: "(i) being physically received by the close of business of the required deadline; or (ii) for applications received online or electronically, by midnight, of the required deadline." (RCW 29A.08.140(1)(a))

A ballot that has been returned to the county auditor and entered into the system but has not yet been signature verified. A received ballot has not yet been accepted/challenged; it's not ready for opening until accepted.

A received ballot could be on a sorter or awaiting further research before signature verification.

Reissued Ballot: A new ballot issued to a voter because the voter's ballot type or style changed as a result of a residential address update – different precinct, race(s), and/or measure(s).

Replacement Ballot: A ballot that is the same type or style and precinct as the most recently issued (now suspended) ballot. The ballot contains the same races and measures. The voter registration record is not updated or changed in a way that impacts the ballot contents.

Suspended Ballot: Any previously issued ballot that is not the voter's current ballot. The ballot becomes suspended when the voter registration record is updated or a replacement is requested, resulting in the issuance of a new current ballot. There may be multiple suspended ballots per voter.