

RETURNED ABSENTEE BALLOT CHAIN OF CUSTODY

General Election 11.8.22

Voted ballot enclosed in secrecy and signature envelope is delivered to the Auditor-Treasurer.

Signature envelope is date stamped. Auditor-Treasurer staff will attach original absentee ballot application to the returned ballot/signature envelope.

Returned ballot/signature envelope and the absentee ballot application are placed in a locked drawer in the Auditor-Treasurer Department.

When the election judge ballot board meets, two members of Auditor-Treasurer staff will remove returned ballots/signature envelopes/applications from the locked drawer and deliver to election judge ballot board.

Election judge members of ballot board will examine each signature envelope and mark it either 'accepted' or 'rejected' per the guidelines provided in MN Statute 203B.121 Subd. 2(b) 1-6. If rejected, the reason will be included on the signature envelope.

If accepted, the envelope will be entered into the *SVRS* - Statewide Voter Registration System as 'accepted'. The envelope will remain in the department where the ballot board meets.

There is a table set up in the Office of a Deputy Auditor-Treasurer whereas the ballot board is essentially supervised at all times during the process. A Deputy Auditor-Treasurer or the Auditor-Treasurer will be available if questions arise. The applications will be stored in a locked drawer within the department.

If a ballot is rejected by the election judge members of the ballot board, the signature envelope, all its contents along with the absentee ballot

application will be returned to Auditor-Treasurer staff. The ballot will be marked in the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) as rejected, as well as the reason for the rejection.

Auditor-Treasurer staff will be responsible for providing the voter with a replacement absentee ballot and signature envelope in place of the rejected ballot. See MN Statute 203B.121 Subd. 2.

The process outlined above will be repeated every other business day until Wednesday, November 2nd. Ballot board will meet daily beginning Thursday, November 3rd and each day thereafter until Tuesday, November 8th. On Wednesday, November 2, the accepted ballots collected from September 23 through Monday, October 31st, can be readied to process through the ballot counting equipment. The Auditor-Treasurer staff may repeat the preparation process again on Monday, November 7th, depending on the volume of ballots that are returned to the Auditor-Treasurer's office. All remaining 'accepted' ballots will be processed through the ballot counting equipment on Tuesday, November 8th.

The Auditor-Treasurer staff will provide the election judge ballot board with reports detailing the number of accepted ballots by precinct. Prior to removing secrecy envelopes from signature envelopes, counts must be verified and confirmed. Only upon satisfactory verification of counts can the separation of secrecy envelope from signature envelope begin. Two person teams of ballot board members will work on one precinct at a time, opening signature envelopes, removing secrecy envelopes, and separating one from the other so that at no time will anyone be able to determine which ballot was cast by a particular voter. After all secrecy envelopes are removed from signature envelopes, the signature envelopes can be opened, and ballots removed.

Two ballot board members initial in the Judge section of the ballot. Ballot board members are responsible for verifying that each ballot removed from the secrecy envelope is for the precinct that is being processed. If it is found that the voter was issued the wrong ballot style, a duplicate of the ballot should be made on the correct ballot style.

Once the ballot count is confirmed, ballots can be run through the ballot counter. In the event a ballot is damaged (stains/creasing/folding/tears/missing timing marks), the votes from the original ballot are duplicated on a new ballot as outlined in Minnesota Administrative Rules 8230.3850. In the event the votes on a ballot cannot be accurately tabulated due to a voters attempt to erase a vote, or a mark made outside the voting oval, voter intent may need to be determined. Ballot board judges will follow MN Statute 204C.22 to complete this process.

When a precinct's ballots are run through the ballot counter, the total on the counter screen will be compared to the expected number of ballots. Any discrepancies will be investigated and corrected. The remaining precincts will be processed as outlined in the preceding steps.

When all voted ballots have been processed through the ballot counter, the receptacle will be opened with two ballot board members present. Ballots will be straightened without being inspected, placed in a dated envelope, and sealed. All ballot board members in attendance will sign over the seal. The originals of any ballots that had been duplicated will be placed in a separate dated envelope, sealed and ballot board members will sign over the seal.

Once processed, all ballots, in their sealed envelopes will remain in a locked drawer in the department where the ballot board meets.

In-person absentee voting ends at 5:00 p.m. Monday, Nov. 7th. Agent-delivered or voter returned absentee ballots must be delivered to the Auditor-Treasurer by 3:00 p.m. on Election Day. The deadline for absentee ballots delivered by USPS or parcel service is 8:00 p.m. Election Day. However, absentee ballots received on Election Day cannot be counted until we verify with the applicable precinct that the voter has not voted in-person.

After Election Day totals are reported to the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office, Auditor-Treasurer staff will prepare for the county canvass. Absentee ballots as well as the voted ballots and supplies returned by the polling sites will be placed in the locked Election Room. (Room 117)

After the county canvass board meets and confirms the results of the election, the voted ballots and other election materials can be prepared for the retention period. The voted ballots remain in the sealed envelopes that have been signed by election judges. Those envelopes are then placed in boxes, sealed, and marked with a 'retain through' date. Election materials are retained for 22 months following the election.