

**WAC 434-261-051 Standards for verifying ballot declaration signatures.**

(1) This regulation, together with WAC 434-261-052 and 434-261-053, describes the process for verifying that a signature on the ballot declaration is the voter's registration signature.

(2) At each stage of the signature verification process, there is a presumption that the signature on the ballot declaration is the voter's signature.

(3) When reviewing ballot declaration signatures, staff assigned to verify signatures shall consider the following criteria:

(a) Agreement in style and general appearance, including basic construction, skill, alignment, fluency, and a general uniformity and consistency between signatures;

(b) Agreement in the proportions of individual letters, height to width, and heights of the upper to lower case letters;

(c) Irregular spacing, slants, or sizes of letters that are duplicated in both signatures;

(d) Agreement of the most distinctive, unusual traits of the signatures;

(e) The ballot declaration signature is in the same format as the voter registration signatures, such as printed, in cursive, or another form;

(f) Agreement of individual characteristics, such as how "t's" are crossed, "i's" are dotted, or loops are made on letters;

(g) Agreement of initial strokes and connecting strokes of the signature;

(h) Agreement of similar endings, such as an abrupt end, a long tail, or loop back around;

(i) Agreement of presence or absence of pen lifts;

(j) Agreement in the way names are spelled; and

(k) After considering the general traits, agreement of the most distinctive, unusual traits of the signatures.

(4) When reviewing ballot declaration signatures that appear to contain discrepancies, staff verifying signatures should accept signatures if the appearance of a discrepancy can reasonably be explained by the following:

(a) A shaky signature that could be health-related or the result of aging;

(b) The voter's use of a variation of the voter's full name, such as the use of initials, including or omitting a middle name, or substituting a middle name for a first name;

(c) A change in the voter's signature over time;

(d) A signature written in haste;

(e) A signature in the voter's registration file that was written with a stylus pen or other electronic signature tool, which may result in a thick or fuzzy quality;

(f) A writing surface that was hard, soft, uneven, or unstable;

(g) The voter has a limited history of fewer than three ballots returned; and

(h) Any other reasonable factor.

(5) An agent, including someone acting under a power of attorney, cannot sign a ballot declaration on behalf of their principal.

(6) If a voter inadvertently signs another voter's ballot declaration, but elections personnel can identify the correct voter and verify that voter's signature, the signature and the ballot must be accepted for the voter that signed the ballot declaration.

(7) All staff verifying ballot declaration signatures must receive training on these signature verification standards before veri-

fyng ballot declaration signatures. They must attend the training at least once every two years. This applies to, but is not necessarily limited to, individuals performing the initial review, secondary review, and review of signatures as part of the cure process. Members of the county canvassing board are required to receive training except as exempted by RCW 29A.04.540.

(8) The canvassing board may designate the county auditor or the county auditor's staff to perform the signature verification function. All personnel assigned to the duty of signature verification shall subscribe to an oath administered by the county auditor regarding the discharge of their duties.

(9) 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, § 434-261-051, filed 3/8/24, effective 5/4/24.]