

WAC 434-261-052 Initial and secondary review of ballot declaration signatures. (1) When conducting an initial review of a ballot declaration signature, the county auditor must accept the signature under the following conditions:

(a) The county auditor must accept the signature unless, considering the criteria in WAC 434-261-051 (3) and (4), the signature on the ballot envelope has multiple, significant, and obvious discrepancies from all signatures in the voter's registration record; or

(b) If the voter is unable to sign their name as they are registered to vote, the signature must be accepted so long as the voter has made a mark, symbol, or signature stamp, and the ballot declaration includes two witness signatures.

(2) If the signature is not accepted following the initial review, the ballot declaration signature must be referred to a second review.

(a) A different person who has received signature verification training under WAC 434-261-051(7) must conduct the second review of the signature.

(b) If, considering the criteria in WAC 434-261-051 (3) and (4), the second reviewer determines that there are multiple, significant, obvious discrepancies from all signatures in the voter's registration record, the voter must be notified of the process to cure the signature;

(3) The county auditor may conduct additional reviews of ballot declaration signatures that have not yet been accepted. For example, if the county auditor becomes aware of reasonable explanations that should be considered under WAC 434-261-051(4), an additional review may be appropriate.

(4) Even if the ballot declaration signature appears to match the signature in the voter registration record, and notwithstanding any other provision, a ballot may be referred to the canvassing board if there is clear, objective evidence, beyond the signature itself, that a ballot declaration signature is fraudulent. This provision is intended to apply only very rarely, such as in instances of confessed forgery or similar circumstances. A person verifying signatures may refer a ballot declaration signature to the county auditor, and, if satisfied that the standard is met, the county auditor may refer the ballot to the canvassing board. The county auditor and the canvassing board may refer the matter to law enforcement.

(5) The county auditor may conduct the initial signature review by using an automated verification system approved by the secretary of state. If a signature is not accepted by the automated verification system, the county auditor must manually use the process described in this section.

(6) If two ballots are returned in one return envelope, ballots may be accepted in the following manner. In all other circumstances, the ballots must be referred to the canvassing board for rejection.

(a) If there is only one valid signature on the ballot declaration and the races and measures voted are the same on both ballots, the races and measures voted the same on both ballots may be counted once;

(b) If there are two valid signatures on the ballot declaration, both ballots may be counted in their entirety; or

(c) If there is one valid signature on the ballot declaration and the envelope contains one voted ballot and one blank ballot without marked votes, the voted ballot may be counted in its entirety.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611. WSR 24-07-018, § 434-261-052, filed 3/8/24, effective 5/4/24.]