WAC 434-379-009 Processing filed petitions. (1) To allow for sufficient personnel to accept and process signed petitions, the sponsor of an initiative or referendum must make an appointment to file the signed petitions at least two business days in advance. Pursuant to RCW 29A.72.170, the secretary of state must reject petitions until a sufficient number that meet the minimum signature requirement are filed together. If the petitions are accepted and filed, additional petitions may be submitted until the applicable deadline established by RCW 29A.72.160. When submitting the petitions, the sponsor must also provide the text of the measure, exactly as it was printed on the circulated petitions, in electronic Microsoft Word format.

(2) Upon receipt of the petitions, the office of the secretary of state shall count the number of petitions received, and provide that total to the sponsor.

(3) A petition may not be rejected merely because it includes stray marks, scribbles, notes, or highlighting as long as the printed text on the petition is not illegible.

(4) A petition may not be rejected merely because the circulator's declaration on the back side of the petition is unsigned, or is signed with a stamp. AGO 2006 No. 13; *Washington Families Standing Together v. Secretary of State Sam Reed*, Thurston County Superior Court No. 09-2-02145-4, September 8, 2009.

(5) Once a petition is submitted to the office of the secretary of state, a person may not withdraw his or her signature from a petition. Letters submitted to the secretary of state requesting the removal of a signature from a petition must be retained by the secretary as part of the public record for the petition.

(6) Each petition must be reviewed for fraud, such as patterns of similar handwriting indicating forged signatures.

(7) Each signature line must be reviewed to invalidate:

(a) Obscenities;

(b) Text that is not a name;

(c) Duplicate names;

(d) Lines that are crossed out and not readable;

(e) Lines that include a name and address that both appear to be fictitious; or

(f) Lines that are blank or unfilled.

(8) The following characteristics of a signature line do not, by themselves, invalidate the signature:

(a) A name that is fictitious with an address that does not appear to be fictitious. Lines that include a name that appears to not be fictitious but an address that does appear to be fictitious, or vice versa;

(b) Lines that are crossed out but still readable;

(c) Lines that are missing a printed name;

(d) Lines that are missing any portion of the address;

(e) Multiple lines that have similar handwriting, as long as the signature handwriting is not similar;

(f) Lines in which the signature, printed name, or address is written in the wrong field; or

(g) Signatures, printed names, or addresses written in the margin.

(9) After each signature line has been reviewed, the remaining signatures must be counted to obtain the total number of signatures submitted. That total must be provided to the sponsor.

(10) The secretary of state must verify either a random sample of the signatures submitted using the statistical formula authorized by

RCW 29A.72.230 and established in WAC 434-379-010, or all of the signatures submitted. If the measure does not qualify for the ballot based on a random sample, the secretary of state must proceed to a full check of all signatures submitted. The secretary of state must follow WAC 434-379-020 to verify signatures.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 29A.04.611. WSR 17-12-090, § 434-379-009, filed 6/6/17, effective 7/7/17; WSR 14-06-040, § 434-379-009, filed 2/26/14, effective 3/29/14; WSR 12-14-074, § 434-379-009, filed 7/2/12, effective 8/2/12.]