

# Community Outreach Plan: Signature Verification

## Cowlitz County Elections

Last updated March 2026

### Introduction

In June 2024, RCW requirements were updated to require that election offices produce a document detailing how they inform the public about signature verification requirements. Cowlitz County Elections will update this document regularly.

The following document outlines our office's current and ongoing practices related to outreach about signature verification.

### Overview

Cowlitz County Elections conducts accurate, secure, and accessible elections for the county's approximately 77,000 registered voters.

In our vote-by-mail system, we verify a voter's identity by comparing the signature on their ballot with any signatures we have in their voter registration record. A voter's signature is a unique identifier used in vote-by-mail elections to verify identity.

Citizens may register to vote in Washington State via a paper registration form, the DOL, or online. For a registration to be valid, a signature is required. That signature is added to the voter's record in the statewide registration database, VoteWA. Each voter is given a unique voter identification number when they are registered.

VoteWA generates a ballot for all eligible voters for each election. The issues/races on a ballot itself are based on the voter's precinct, which is determined by their residential address. Along with the ballot, a postage-paid return envelope which the voter must sign is included. The envelope has a unique ID number printed on it. If a voter requests a replacement ballot or moves during the voting window, a new ballot will be generated with its own unique ID number.

After the voter receives their ballot packet, they vote the ballot and place it inside the secrecy sleeve, which goes inside the return envelope. They then sign the return envelope and return it to Cowlitz County Elections either through the mail or by depositing it in a ballot drop box.

When a voter forgets to sign their ballot, or trained staff identify a mismatch between the signature on a ballot and the signature in a voter's record, that voter's ballot is held – or "challenged" – until the voter can respond to the challenge. The ballot remains unopened and is placed in secure storage until it can be cured.

The team at Cowlitz County Elections is dedicated to remedying challenged ballots and ensuring we can count every valid ballot. We aim to reduce all signature challenge rates, increase cure rates, and make signatures less challenging, in all ways, for all voters.

### Existing Efforts to Educate Voters about Signatures and Challenges

Knowing how signatures are used in elections and how verification happens could help voters avoid a simple mistake that might leave their ballot uncounted. Similarly, having a baseline of knowledge about

signatures and voting might make the process of voting less intimidating for first-time or sporadic voters.

With that in mind, Cowlitz County Elections has added information and messaging about signatures on our website, ballot packet materials, and the Local Voters' Pamphlet.

- **Outreach after a signature challenge.**

Cowlitz County Elections mails a letter to any voter with a signature challenge within one business day. In addition, if the voter has provided a phone number or email address, we reach out via these methods as well, urging them to take action to resolve their signature challenge.

- **Sharing information on our website.**

Cowlitz County Elections provides information for voters about [signature challenges](#) and [signature updates](#) on our website. These pages include information about how signatures are verified, what voters can do to cure a signature challenge or update their signature, and why their signature matters in elections.

- **Signature update mailings.**

During signature verification, staff make note of any voter with a signature that has changed or seems to be old. After the election, a letter and signature update form are mailed to the voter letting them know that their ballot was accepted, however, they could benefit from a signature update. Many voters return the update form, providing more than one signature to further reduce their risk of a signature challenge in a future election.

This is an ongoing program, and Cowlitz County Elections sends letters to voters after each election. We reach out to voters who had their ballot accepted in the election, who would also benefit from an updated signature due to natural changes in the voter's signature over time.

- **Ballot alerts via text.**

Cowlitz County Elections utilizes the ballot alerts in VoteWA, which are text notifications letting voters know where their ballot is in the process. Voters who sign up get an alert when their ballot is received by the elections office and when their signature is accepted and ballot ready to be counted.

Voters with a signature challenge receive a message informing them of the issue and encouraging them to take action.

## Expanding Education on Signatures

Many of the Signature Education and Outreach efforts listed above are ongoing. In addition to those efforts, Cowlitz County Elections will:

- Share information with voters about Department of Licensing registration and the relationship between their DOL signature and their voter registration record.
- Create posters and/or infographics to share on Elections Website and at community outreach events.

## Materials Prepared in Spanish

The items listed below are part of the community outreach plan as defined in RCW 29A.60 and ESSB 5890 and will be translated into Spanish. This effort aims to ensure that all members of our community have access to important information and resources, regardless of their primary language.

- Cure Letter
- Signature Update Letter

## Resources

[Signature Verification Education YouTube Video](#)

[Signature Update Form](#)

[Signature Update Form – Spanish Version](#)