

# RETURNED ABSENTEE BALLOT CHAIN OF CUSTODY

## Primary Election 8/13/2024

A voted absentee ballot is enclosed in the tan secrecy envelope and white signature envelope. The ballot is delivered to the Auditor-Treasurer's office (Rm116) in-person or by mail.

The signature envelope is date stamped upon return to the office. The Auditor-Treasurer staff will record the ballot number in SVRS - Statewide Voter Registration System as "received". The signature envelope will then be attached to the original absentee ballot application. The returned ballot will be deposited into a sealed ballot box. The seal number will be recorded on the ballot box log.

The Ballot Board will meet every 3-5 days until Tuesday, August 13<sup>th</sup>. More meetings may be added depending on the volume of ballots that are returned to the Auditor-Treasurer. Returned Ballots will be delivered to the Ballot Board within 5 days of return to the office. Within 14 days of the election, ballots will be delivered to the ballot board within three days of return. The ballot board will work in teams balanced by political party.

When the ballot board meets, two members will verify the seal number before opening the ballot box. The ballot board will remove the returned ballots and attached applications from the ballot box.

At least two ballot board members 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 accepted, the envelope will be entered into SVRS as 'accepted' by the Auditor-Treasurer staff. The ballot board will then verify the count of ballots per precinct compared to the accepted report generated in SVRS. The ballot board initials each signature envelope while reviewing.

If rejected, the reason must be included on the signature envelope. If a ballot is rejected, it will be returned to the Auditor-Treasurer staff. The ballot will be marked in 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. See MN Statute 203B.121 Subd. 2.

Once ballots have been marked rejected or accepted in SVRS, the ballot board will sort the accepted ballots by precinct and seal them within a ballot box. The seal number will be recorded. The rejected ballots are sealed in an envelope marked with spoiled/rejected ballots and will not be opened.

At the close of business on the 19<sup>th</sup> day before the election, ballots can no longer be clawed back. At this point the ballot board can begin processing the returned ballots.

The Auditor-Treasurer staff will provide the ballot board with reports from SVRS detailing the number of accepted ballots by precinct. Prior to removing secrecy envelopes from signature

envelopes, precinct counts must be verified and confirmed. Only upon satisfactory verification of counts can the separation of secrecy envelopes from signature envelopes 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 the 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 each 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. 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 flap. 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 flap.

The regular timeframe for absentee voting ends at 5:00 p.m. Monday, August 12<sup>th</sup>. Ballots can be issued through the Agent Delivery Process until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. All absentee ballots must be returned by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day to be counted. However, absentee ballots received on Election Day cannot be counted until it is verified with the applicable precinct that the voter has not voted in-person.

After 8:00 p.m. and all absentee ballots have been tabulated, the ballot board will close the polls. The ballot board will complete the required summary statements and deliver the Absentee results to the Auditor-Treasurer. All absentee ballots and voted ballots from the polling place will be stored in a locked room through the contest period.

The absentee totals are combined with the totals from Election Day polling places and are reported to the State. Election Results can be found online here:

<https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/election-results/>

The Auditor-Treasurer staff will then prepare for the county canvass. 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.

*Auditor/Mydata/Elections 2024/ Ballot Board/AB Ballot Chain of Command Primary 8.13.24*