Corrective Action Procedures for Local Elections

Elections Division – Texas Secretary of State

Resources

Elections Forms Index

https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/forms/pol-sub/index.shtml

Conducting Your Elections Page

https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/conducting/index.shtml

Texas Election Code

https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/

 Advisory No. 2023-13 - NEW LAW: Senate Bill 1599 - Changes to the Corrective Action Process for Defects on Application for a Ballot by Mail and Carrier Envelope

Topics Covered

- Update to official Application for Ballot by Mail
- New web posting requirements
- New requirements for reviewing and processing an ABBM
- Updates to forms regarding rejection of an ABBM
- Voting by mail for voters who participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program
- Review of carrier envelopes for voters who participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program
- Update to procedure for surrendered ballots at the polling place



Official Application for Ballot by Mail



Official Application for Ballot by Mail

New Law: House Bill 315 (Effective September 1, 2023)

- Requires a statement on the officially prescribed application for ballot by mail form that explains the benefits to a voter of furnishing the voter's telephone number and how providing that number assists the early voting clerk. The SOS issued an updated ABBM for counties and local political subdivisions which includes the required information on September 1, 2023.
 - Counties and local political subdivisions may continue to use existing stock of the official ABBM for distribution as needed. However, counties and local political subdivisions should include a sticker with the prescribed language to be included on the application if you continue to use existing stock.

Sec. 84.011, Texas Election Code



Web Posting Requirements for ABBMs

New Law: Senate Bill 477 (Effective June 18, 2023)

- Amended Section 84.013 of the Election Code, which directs the Secretary of State to provide a printable application for a ballot by mail in a format that complies with Section 84.0121(a) of the Code.
- Added Section 84.0121 to the Code to provide that an EV clerk must post the official application form for an early voting ballot on the clerk's Internet website, if the clerk maintains an Internet website, in a format that allows a person to easily complete the application directly on the website before printing.
 - The web posting requirement addressed above is not limited to county election officers. As such, the EV clerk for a local political subdivision that does not contract with a county or conduct its election jointly with a county is required to provide a link to the ABBM on the EV clerk's Internet website if the clerk maintains a website.
 - It is recommended that the EV clerk provide a link to the ABBM for voters on a permanent basis.



- It is the EV clerk's responsibility to review applications for ballot by mail, determine whether the applicant is entitled to vote by mail, and provide ballot materials to the voter.
 - As a reminder, the EV clerk must verify that the personal identification information provided by the voter on the application—i.e., a DPS-issued driver's license, EIC, or personal identification card number, the last four digits of the applicant's social security number, or a statement that the applicant has not been issued any of these numbers identifies the same voter identified on the applicant's voter registration record.

Secs. 86.001, 86.002



New Law: Senate Bill 1599 (Effective September 1, 2023)

- Amended Section 86.008(a) of the Code to provide that the opportunity to correct an application applies to a ballot to be voted by mail for which the applicant failed to comply with a requirement provided by:
 - Section 84.002 of the Code (contents of application);
 - Section 84.0021 (contents of application for participant in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program); or
 - Section 84.003(a) (signing application by witness) in a manner that would lead, if not corrected, to the rejection of the applicant's ABBM.



New Law: Senate Bill 1599 (Effective September 1, 2023)

- Amended Section 86.008 of the Code to provide that not later than the second day after the EV clerk discovers a defect(s) on an application, the EV clerk shall:
 - (1) determine if it would be possible for the applicant to correct the defect and return an application form by mail by the 11th day before election day, as applicable; and
 - (2) notwithstanding any other law, if the clerk determines it would be possible to correct the defect and return an application form before the deadline, the clerk must deliver an official application form to the applicant.



- The clerk must include with the application form delivered to the applicant a written notice containing:
 - (1) a brief explanation of each defect in the noncomplying application;
 - (2) a statement informing the voter that the voter is not entitled to vote an early voting ballot unless the application complies with all legal requirements; and
 - (3) instructions for submitting the second application.
- Any written notice of an ABBM rejection must state the reason for the rejection and be delivered to the voter at both the voter's residence address and the mailing address on the ABBM, if different.

Secs. 86.001, 86.008



New Law: Senate Bill 1599 (Effective September 1, 2023)

- Amended Section 86.008 of the Code to provide that if the EV clerk determines that it would **not** be possible for the applicant to correct the defect and return an application by mail by the 11th day before election day, the clerk may:
 - Notify the applicant of the defect(s) by telephone or email and provide the applicant a brief explanation of each defect in the application;
 - Provide a statement informing the voter that the voter is not entitled to vote an early voting ballot unless the application complies with all legal requirements; and
 - Provide instructions for submitting a corrected application.
 - The EV clerk must also provide the applicant instructions for correcting the defect using the Ballot by Mail Tracker, if possible.



- The EV clerk must also inform the applicant that the applicant may come to the EV clerk's office by the 11th day before election day and correct the defect in person.
- If the voter personally comes to the EV clerk's office by the 11th day before election to correct a defective application, it is recommended that the voter be provided a new ABBM to complete in person rather than correct the defect or provide additional information on the defective application.
- The EV clerk/deputy clerk should review the defective ABBM with the voter and address the defect(s) with the voter while in the office in order to reduce the likelihood of defects in any future ABBMs submitted by the voter.
 - The EV clerk/deputy clerk should thoroughly review the newly filed application before the voter leaves the EV clerk's office to ensure that there are no other defects or issues with the application that could result in a second rejection of the application.

- A voter must also be provided notice about the ability to correct certain defects on the application using the online tool and if possible, permit the applicant to correct such defects using the online tool.
 - The online tool is the Secretary of State's online Ballot by Mail Tracker, available at <u>www.votetexas.gov.</u>
 - The online tool enables a voter who submits an application for a ballot by mail to track the location and status of the voter's application and ballot, receive notice of certain defects, and if possible, correct said defects in the voter's application and carrier envelope.

Secs. 86.015(a), 86.008(c-1), 87.0271(e-1), 87.0411(e-1)



New Law: Senate Bill 1599 (Effective September 1, 2023)

- Amended Section 86.015(b) of the Code to reflect that a voter is required to provide the following information to access the Ballot by Mail Tracker:
 - Name;
 - Date of birth;
 - Last four digits of the voter's social security number; and
 - Voter's driver's license number or their personal identification card number issued by the Department of Public Safety
 - Effective September 1, 2023, voters are no longer required to provide their registration address to access the Ballot by Mail Tracker.



- As a reminder, the EV clerk may also deliver in person to the voter a second application if the defective original application is timely and may receive, by the 11th day before election day, the corrected application in person from the voter.
 - If this procedure is used, it must be applied uniformly to all applicants.
 - A poll watcher is entitled to accompany the clerk and observe the procedures.

Sec. 86.008



- As a result of the notice requirements provided by SB 1599 and Section 86.008 of the Code, the SOS amended certain prescribed forms. Below is a list of defects on the application which a voter may correct using the Ballot by Mail Tracker, effective September 1, 2023:
 - Voter submits an application for ballot by mail on the ground of disability but fails to include the affirmation required under Section 84.002 of the Code
 - Voter submits an application for ballot by mail on the ground of expected absence from the county but does not provide an address outside of the county
 - Voter submits an application for ballot by mail on the ground confinement in jail or due to involuntary civil commitment but does not provide the address of the jail/civil commitment facility or a relative
 - Voter did not indicate the reason they are eligible to vote by mail on the application

- Voter did not indicate a party preference, which is required if the voter is voting by mail in a primary election
- Voter did not provide a residence address on the application
- Voter did not provide their Texas Driver's License Number, Texas Personal Identification Card Number, Texas Election Identification Certificate Number or the last four (4) digits of their Social Security Number or the number provided did not match their voter registration record
- Voter indicated that they are 65 years of age or older or have a disability as the ground for voting by mail. The address the voter requested that the ballot be mailed to is not associated with the voter's registration information as either their residence address or the designated mailing address. If the voter wants to have the ballot mailed to an address other than the residence or mailing address associated with their voter registration information, they must designate that it is the address of a hospital, nursing home, long term-care facility, retirement center or that of a relative. If a relative, the voter must state the relationship to the relative.

- NOTE: If the voter's application included more than one of the eight defects addressed in the previous slides, the voter will NOT be able to correct the defects using the Ballot by Mail Tracker.
 - The voter will need to submit a new ABBM by mail or in person to the EV clerk, which must be received by the 11th day before election day.



 The SOS updated forms pertaining to these procedures, which were made available on September 1, 2023.



- Notice of Rejected Application for Ballot by Mail (Form 6-2)
 - The SOS has updated the Notice of Rejected Application for Ballot by Mail to notify voters that they may come to the EV clerk's office in person to correct a defect(s). Form 6-2 should be used by the EV clerk if the defect(s) included one which cannot be corrected using the Ballot by Mail Tracker or included multiple defects.
 - If the reason for the defect was that the EV clerk could not validate the Texas Driver's License Number, Texas Personal Identification Card Number, Texas Election Identification Certificate Number, or the last 4 digits of a Social Security Number due to the voter registration record not containing this information, the EV clerk must also include a postage-paid voter registration application to accompany this notice so that the voter may add the number(s) to his or her voter registration record. The voter may also update his/her voter registration information online at www.Texas.gov.

- Notice of Rejected Application for Ballot by Mail Containing a Defect That May Be Corrected Online (Form 6-3)
 - The SOS has amended Form 6-3 to include additional defects that may be corrected by a voter using the Ballot by Mail Tracker. The form was also amended to inform voters that they may correct the defect on their application by submitting a new application by mail or in person to the EV clerk by the deadline provided.
 - The notice includes information explaining how to correct the defect by using the online Ballot by Mail Tracker, available at <u>www.votetexas.gov</u>. If the applicant corrects the defect through the Ballot by Mail Tracker by the deadline, the EV clerk shall provide a ballot to the applicant.
 - If the reason for the defect was that the voter's application did not contain any of the personal identification numbers associated with his/her voter registration record, or the number provided on the application did not match the number on the voter's registration record, the EV clerk should use this form (not Form 6-2).

- Notice of Rejected Application for Ballot by Mail Containing a Defect That May Be Corrected Online (Form 6-3)
 - The EV clerk must review all pending ABBMs wherein voters were notified of a rejected application which included a defect that can be corrected using the Ballot by Mail Tracker. (Form 6-3)
 - If the applicant did not subsequently correct the defect as indicated on the form, the EV clerk may not send the voter a ballot by mail.
 - The EV clerk does not need to send the voter another notice as amended Form 6-3 informs the voter that failing to take corrective action by the required deadline will result in a final rejection of their application but that no additional notice would be provided.



Ballot by Mail Tracker

- Requires the Secretary of State to provide an online tool on the Secretary of State's website that enables a person who has submitted an application for a ballot by mail to track the location and status of the person's application and ballot.
- For each carrier envelope containing a mail ballot, the ballot by mail tracker must assign or record a serially numbered and sequentially issued barcode or tracking number unique to each envelope.
 - Best Practice: Local entities will need to work with the counties in comparing the ID numbers provided on the ABBM and carrier envelope to the ID numbers on the voter's registration record and reporting the ballot by mail activity in TEAM so voters can utilize the Ballot Tracker



 If a voter corrects a defective ABBM after early voting by personal appearance has begun, the EV clerk should confirm that the voter did not vote in person before sending balloting materials to the voter.



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Voters who Participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program

 At any time during the year or at least by the close of regular business in the clerk's office or 12 noon, whichever is later, on the 11th day before election day in any given election, an applicant must appear in person at the EV clerk's office and complete and sign a Confidential Voter Registration Form and Early Voting Ballot Application.

Sec. 81.38, Title 1, Texas Administrative Code

Secs. 13.002, 84.0021, 84.007, Texas Election Code



- Because the voter who participates in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program must appear in person at the EV clerk's office to submit his or her application, we strongly recommend that the EV clerk and the deputy EV clerks thoroughly review the voter's application before the voter leaves the EV clerk's office.
- If any defect(s) or missing information is discovered while the voter is still at the EV clerk's office, it should be immediately addressed before the voter leaves the office.



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New Law: Senate Bill 1599 (Effective September 1, 2023)

• If a defect in the Confidential Voter Registration Form and Early Voting Ballot Application is not discovered by the EV clerk or deputy clerk until **after** the voter has left the EV clerk's office, the EV clerk must notify the voter of the defect(s) in order to afford the voter an opportunity to correct said defect(s).

Sec. 86.008



- Voters who participate in this program are not registered to vote using the county's voter registration system, and no information for that voter will appear on any form but the Confidential Voter Registration Form and Early Voting Ballot Application, which is confidential.
- This means that voters who participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program are not authorized to correct a defect on their application using the Ballot by Mail Tracker.
- Further, voters who participate in this program must submit their applications for voting by mail in person at the EV clerk's office. As such, these voters also cannot submit a new application to the EV clerk by mail.



- If the EV clerk discovers a defect(s) in a voter's application, the EV clerk must determine not later than the second day after discovering the defect if it would be possible to mail the voter in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program a notice of the defect with sufficient time so that the voter receives the notice of defect and is able to return to the EV clerk's office by the 11th day before election day to correct the defect(s).
- If the EV clerk determines that there is sufficient time, the clerk should mail the voter the notice of rejected application.



- Notice of Rejected Confidential Voter Registration Form and Early Voting Ballot Application Containing a Defect that May be Corrected (Form 6-18)
 - The SOS prescribed a form that EV clerks may use to notify voters who participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program of defect(s) with their application.
 - Notice of Rejected Voter Registration Form and Early Voting Ballot Application Containing a Defect that May be Corrected
 - This notice was made available effective September 1, 2023 and can be used to notify voters of the defect(s) and that the voter must return to the EV clerk's office in person by the 11th day before election day to correct the defect(s) if they wish to vote by mail.



- If the EV clerk determines that it would **not** be possible to mail the voter this notice with sufficient time for the voter to receive the notice, the clerk may notify the voter by telephone or email and provide the voter a brief explanation of each defect in the application, a statement informing the voter that the voter is not entitled to vote an early voting ballot unless the application complies with all legal requirements, and that the voter must return to the EV clerk's office in person to correct the defect(s) by the 11th day before election day.
- The voter may not have a family member, friend, or representative personally appear on the voter's behalf.



 In light of the fact that voters who participate in this program may only correct defects on their applications in person, it is imperative that EV clerks and deputy clerks properly review the application for defects before the voter leaves the EV clerk's office.



- After the voter who participates in this confidentiality program returns their carrier envelope, the EV clerk or deputy EV clerk must confirm that the personal identification number provided on the carrier envelope matches a personal identification number provided on the Confidential Voter Registration Form and Application for Ballot by Mail.
- If the information does not match, the carrier envelope was not signed, the signature on the application was compared to the signature on the carrier envelope but it could not be immediately determined that the signatures were made by the same person, the carrier envelope contained incomplete information with respect to a witness, or the carrier envelope contained incomplete information with respect to an assistant, the EV clerk must notify the voter of the defect.

Sec. 86.011, Texas Election Code

Sec. 81.38(d), Title 1, Texas Administrative Code



- Not later than the second day after the EV clerk discovers a defect(s) in a carrier envelope, the EV clerk must determine if it would be possible for the voter to receive a notice of defect within a reasonable time to correct the defect by the sixth day after election day.
- If the EV clerk believes that there is reasonable time to mail the voter the notice of defect and a corrective action form by mail or by common or contract carrier, the EV clerk shall send the voter a notice of the defect and a corrective action form.
- The EV clerk should NOT mail the voter the defective carrier envelope with the notice of defect and corrective action form. Further, because these voters participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program, the review of their carrier envelope is performed by the EV clerk/deputy EV clerks, not the SVC/EVBB.

Sec. 86.011, Texas Election Code

Sec. 81.38(d), Title 1, Texas Administrative Code



AG Confidentiality Program

• If the EV clerk determines that it would **not** be possible for the voter to receive the notice of defect within a reasonable time to correct the defect, the EV clerk may notify the voter of the defect by telephone and email and inform the voter that the voter may submit a corrective action form by mail or by common or contract carrier, or come to the EV clerk's office in person not later than the sixth day after election day to correct the defect.



AG Confidentiality Program

- Notice of Carrier Defect Issued by the Early Voting Clerk for Confidential Voters (Form 6-16)
 - The SOS has prescribed a form, Notice of Carrier Defect Issued by the Early Voting Clerk for Confidential Voters, that EV clerks may use to notify voters who participate in the Attorney General Address Confidentiality Program of defect(s) with their carrier envelope.
 - This notice was made available effective September 1, 2023 and can be used to notify voters of the defect(s) and that the voter may either correct the defect on the corrective action form provided with their notice and return it to the EV clerk by mail or by common or contract carrier, or come to the EV clerk's office in person not later than the sixth day after election day to correct the defect.
 - The voter's name is not entered on the Roster of Voters with Defective Carrier Envelopes. Instead, a notation of the defect is made on the Roster for Early Voting by Mail for Address Confidential Applicants.

Cancellation of a Ballot by Mail Under Section 84.032 of the Election Code

Cancellation of a Ballot by Mail Under Section 84.032 of the Election Code

New Law: Senate Bill 1599 (Effective September 1, 2023)

- Amended Section 84.032 of the Code to provide that the presiding judge/deputy EV clerk must enter certain information on a register of ballots to be voted by mail which are returned at a polling place on election day and during early voting by personal appearance.
 - Specifically, the presiding judge/deputy EV clerk must enter the name of each voter who returns a ballot to be voted by mail and the ballot's number on the register.



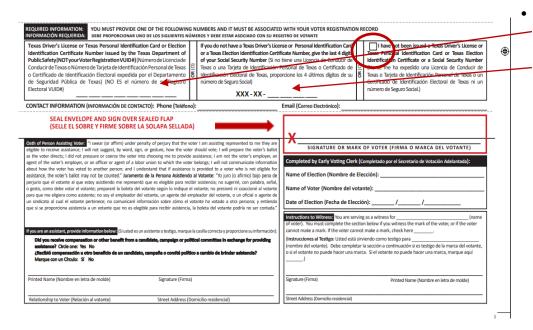
Cancellation of a Ballot by Mail Under Section 84.032 of the Election Code

 The SOS has created a form, Register of Surrendered Ballots by Mail (Form 7-64), for use at election day polling places and early voting polling places. The presiding judge and deputy EV clerks may use this register to record the name of each voter and the ballot number as required.



ID REQUIREMENTS ON CARRIER ENVELOPES

Envelope Open – Inside Flap



Voter must add their personal identification information to the Carrier Envelope



Key Points to Remember

- Voters are not required to provide both types of identification numbers.
- If a voter provides both numbers, only one number has to match the VR record.
- The secrecy flap may be opened by the early voting clerk's staff for processing.
- Be mindful with these carrier envelopes, as they have personally identifiable information that needs to be guarded.
- Carrier envelopes are not public information at this point in the election process.



PROCESS FOR EVBB/SVC



Convening the EVBB

- New Law Senate Bill 1599
 - Amended Sec. 87.0222 to require early voting ballot boards to have their first meeting not later than 9 days before election day, if they have not already met before that day. Notice must be posted at least 24 hours before each delivery of ballots to the ballot board.

ID Comparison Requirements

- The EVBB shall only accept a ballot if the personal identification information (ex: SSN or TXDL) matches the voter registration record.
- The SVC/EVBB is matching the information on the carrier envelope to the VR record.
- The number on the carrier envelope does not have to be the same number on the ABBM – it must only match the VR record.

ID Comparison Requirements

For EVC / SVC / EVBB Review of Carrier Envelopes:

- If the ID numbers on the carrier match the numbers on the voter's ABBM/FPCA (which was previously validated by the EVC), then the EVC/SVC/EVBB can accept that information as validated for purposes of the carrier envelope.
- If the ID numbers on the carrier do not match the numbers on the voter's ABBM/FPCA, then the entity's EVC/SVC/EVBB must arrange a date and time with the county to validate the information on the voter's registration record against the carrier envelope.
 - Validation can be performed with the county and entity over the phone or in-person.
 - Entity's EVC/SVC/EVBB should make a notation on the carrier or a separate document indicating that the verification occurred and including the date of verification.

Rebuttable Presumption

- If the personal identification information provided matches the VR record, the signatures on the ABBM and the carrier envelope are rebuttably presumed to be those of the voter.
- The presumption may be rebutted by presenting other past signatures on file with the EVC or VR that would support a finding that the signatures on the carrier envelope and ABBM are not those of the voter.
- The EVBB/SVC shall compare signatures regardless of whether the rebuttable presumption exists.



Questions?

Legal Team (800) 252-2216, Option 2

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We are here to help!

Thank you!

