



Election Integrity Project[®] *California*
EVERY LAWFULLY CAST VOTE ACCURATELY COUNTED

Vote Safe in 2024 and a Little More

Part 4 - How and Why to Observe Ballot Processing

Most voters are surprised to learn that their mail-in ballot is not just opened and counted as soon as it arrives at the Elections Office. **In actuality, there can be a several-day delay between the time your ballot arrives and when it is tabulated.**

Vote by mail ballots pass through many hands and a lengthy and complex series of procedures, any one of which may expose the ballot to potential error or manipulation.

If you have never been to the Elections Office in your county, put it on your “To Do” list.

A visit there may surprise you, overwhelm you, astonish you, frustrate you, dismay you, encourage you or have any host of other impact - all depending on your county.

The Primary Election officially gets underway today, the first official day of ballot mailing and the first day of early voting. EIPC*a* encourages you to visit your County Elections Office SOON, before activity becomes too frantic.

Become acquainted with your Registrar, the facility and what the public observation protocols are.

Stand there, look around, take a deep breath and remind yourself,

“This and everything that happens here belongs to me and my fellow California citizens. It is my responsibility to find out first hand whether it is operating lawfully and transparently.”

Election oversight is my right and my responsibility.

Beginning February 6, and continuing through April 5, carve out some dates on your calendar to fulfill that obligation by visiting to observe as often as you can.

Use the information provided in this “Vote Safe and a Little More in 2024” article series to prepare you to be a knowledgeable and effective Citizen Observer.

By law the Elections Office must inform the public at least 48 hours in advance of any ballot processing activities.

- Visit their website or call ahead to ensure your visit will be productive.

As ballots begin to come in

they will go through many steps prior to being counted.

At each step there are opportunities for error, carelessness, or intentional ill-intent.

Observer presence keeps overburdened workers more alert and focused, and less likely to make a mistake, intended or not.

Whether arriving via USPS, ballot drop box, ballot collector (harvester) or in-person early voting, a ballot return envelope's first stop is

Intake:

1. Here ballots are sorted (usually by district or precinct), scanned and prepared for signature verification - this is done by sorting and scanning machines.
 - The barcode on the return envelope contains the voter's identification information.
 - The scan allows the Elections Office to send each voter an alert that the ballot has been received.
 - There is reason for concern if you receive notice that your ballot has been received and counted. Clearly the latter cannot be guaranteed at this point.
 - The scan also allows the system to pull the voter's on-file electronic signature up and unite it with the scanned signature for comparison.
2. The next major step in ballot processing is signature verification.
 - Signatures must be checked to see that they compare favorably with the signature on file for each voter.

We will devote Part 5 to the details of this process.

3. **In the third major step of processing**, envelopes with accepted signatures are opened and **the ballots are extracted and inspected.**
 - Please observe this process and watch to see that ballots are being properly inspected and sorted.
 - Ballots deemed to be damaged (torn, wrinkled, stained) are sent to be duplicated.
 - Also requiring duplication are sample ballots submitted in lieu of the real ballot and Remote Access Vote by Mail (RAVBM) ballots printed on the voter's home computer. (This is a good reason to avoid RAVBM unless you are remotely deployed or in need because of a handicap.)
 - Undamaged ballots proceed to be tabulated. Tomorrow's article will detail this procedure.

- Envelopes found to contain more than one ballot inside must be immediately set aside for evaluation.

4. After Election Day postmarks must be verified.

- Ballots postmarked on or before Election Day may arrive via verified postal delivery service up to seven (7) days after Election Day and be counted.
- If the postmark on the envelope is missing or illegible, the signature on the envelope must be dated by the voter on or before Election Day.

As a Citizen Observer, watch for anything that is troublesome or seems insecure. And remember that the SOS Regulations for Observers mandate that Observers have access to a Supervisor and the ability to ask questions and receive timely answers.

**Be sure to ask for information and explanations when you need them.
Speak ONLY to a Supervisor.**

Citizen Observers should look for:

- Is every part of the process transparent and observable?
- Are all ballot return envelopes secured and clearly marked as to where they are in the process?
- Are ballot packets returned as “undeliverable” secured UNOPENED for storage?
- After election day, are envelopes being inspected for appropriate postmark?

While observing:

- Always be polite and respectful.
- Keep your questions appropriate and non-confrontational.
- Remember you have no right to argue, accuse, insist or “school”. Doing so may be considered interference and you may be ejected or worse for persisting.
- Asking too many questions can also interfere with the process as well, so be aware and sensitive.
- Step outside and call the appropriate [EIPCa Observer HOTLINE](#) if your questions are not answered to your satisfaction or if you have further concerns.
- Call the appropriate [EIPCa Observer HOTLINE](#) if you feel you do not have appropriate access to observe meaningfully.

**Remember - California law gives you the right
to be close enough to see and hear
EVERY aspect of the election process.**

https://www.eip-ca.com/articles/vote_safe_part4_2024.pdf
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