



*Election Integrity Project*<sup>®</sup> **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<sup>a</sup> 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](https://www.eip-ca.com/articles/vote_safe_part4_2024.pdf)  
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