



# GUIDE TO MAIL BALLOT TABULATION

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
BOARD OF ELECTIONS  
50 Branch Avenue  
Providence, Rhode Island 02904

## BOARD OF ELECTIONS PROCEDURES FOR MAIL BALLOT TABULATION

The State of Rhode Island's optical scan precinct count election system provides a fast and accurate way of processing and tabulating mail ballots. In accordance with the requirements and capabilities of the optical scan system, the Board of Elections has developed procedures for the handling, processing and totaling of mail ballots in order to insure the integrity of the electoral process.

The procedures for mail ballot tabulation and the steps to be followed for processing those ballots which are unable to be "read" by the automated ballot counter are as follows:

1. After processing and certification of the mail ballots, they shall be separated in packages in accordance with their respective cities and towns, in the presence of the board and all other interested parties. In each instance the board or its designee shall open the enclosing envelope, and without looking at the votes cast on the enclosed ballot, shall remove the ballot from the envelope and store in secured containers until processing on Election Day.
2. Upon opening of the polls on Election Day in public, the mail ballots will be given to the operator of the automated ballot counter for processing by the automated ballot counter.
3. Ballots that are torn or otherwise damaged upon opening of the envelopes in addition to ballots that are unable to be processed by the automated ballot counter (i.e. improperly marked ballots, damaged ballots, blank ballots) that have been out-stacked by the automated ballot counter will be given to the Board or its designee to determine voter intent and remaking of the original ballot. Duplicated ballots will be kept together in a secured container until the duplication process is completed. (Refer to *Duplicating Ballots*).
4. Ballots containing write-in votes will be out-stacked to the write-in vote compartment of the automated ballot counter. (Refer to *Write-In Votes*)
5. Upon completion of the processing of the mail ballots, said mail ballots shall be placed in the proper storage container. The storage containers will be sealed and stored at the Board of Elections for a period of twenty-two (22) months.
6. Mail ballots shall not be totaled until 9:00 p.m. on election day.

**BOARD OF ELECTIONS**  
**PROCEDURES FOR MAIL BALLOT DUPLICATION**

The ballots that are not able to be processed by the automated ballot counter due to damage, improper marking, Federal Write-In Absentee/Military or Overseas Ballots, Official State Blank Ballots or other circumstances shall be duplicated in accordance with the following procedures.

**BLANK BALLOTS**

Two or more commissioners of the State Board or its designees will review the rejected blank ballot to determine voter intent. Voter intent may be determined if the voter circled, checked or made any other distinguishing marks next to a candidate's name. If voter intent can be determined the ballot shall be duplicated (refer to *Duplicating Ballots*). If the Board is unable to determine voter intent, the ballot will be processed as a blank ballot.

**FEDERAL WRITE-IN ABSENTEE BALLOTS/OVERSEAS/MILITARY  
BALLOTS/OFFICIAL STATE BLANK BALLOTS**

Two or more commissioners or their designees shall review the paper ballots received from the envelop and duplicate them pursuant to the *Duplicating Ballots* Section

**DAMAGED BALLOTS**

Damaged ballots shall be duplicated pursuant to the *Duplicating Ballots* procedures.

**DUPLICATING BALLOTS**

Ballots shall be duplicated in the following manner:

1. A blank ballot will be retrieved from the blank ballot inventory for the appropriate precinct, and stamped "DUPLICATE" on the back of the ballot and assigned a number. All duplicated ballots will be numbered sequentially according to the order in which they will be processed. The numbering sequence will be established by the Board of Elections.
2. The original ballot will be stamped on the back "ORIGINAL" and given the same identifying number as the duplicate ballot.
3. Two or more Commissioners or their designees will then remake the ballot. Duplicated ballots will remain together in a secured container until the duplication process is completed.
4. All duplicated ballots will be delivered to the operator of the appropriate automated ballot counter for processing.
5. After the duplicate ballot has been processed through the automated ballot counter, the assigned Board members or their designee will remove the duplicate ballot from the tray of the ballot counter and attach it to the corresponding original ballot. Both ballots will be placed into the appropriate storage container.

**BOARD OF ELECTIONS  
PROCEDURES FOR MAIL BALLOT WRITE-IN VOTES**

**WRITE-IN VOTES**

The procedures for processing and recording of ballots containing write-in votes are as follows:

1. The automated ballot counter will out-stack ballots containing write-in votes after the automated ballot counter records votes on contests where write-ins do not appear.
2. The Board or its designee will record on write-in tally sheets the write-in votes.
3. Ballots containing write-in votes will be placed into the appropriate storage container after the write-in votes have been recorded.

Note: Write-in votes are not permitted in primaries; provided, that write-in votes may be cast for presidential candidates at any presidential primary. Write-in votes are not permitted for delegate candidates at a presidential primary.

**RHODE ISLAND  
BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

50 Branch Avenue  
Providence, Rhode Island 02904  
Tel: 401-222-2345  
Fax: 401-222-3135  
[www.elections.ri.gov](http://www.elections.ri.gov)

**John A. Daluz**  
Chairman

**Frank J. Rego**  
Vice Chairman

**Richard Pierce**  
*Commissioner*

**Florence G. Gormley**  
*Commissioner*

**Martin Joyce**  
*Commissioner*

**Richard DuBois**  
*Commissioner*

**William West**  
*Commissioner*

**Robert Kando**  
*Executive Director*