



Candidate petition guidelines

This document summarizes the Secretary of State's review process for candidate petitions. While our general processes are similar to those in prior years, new laws and a new petition review software led to the changes we explain below. This document is not exhaustive. Candidates should read and be familiar with Article 4 of Title 1, C.R.S., and Secretary of State Election Rule 15. If you have questions or comments about the content of this document, please send them to ballot.access@sos.state.co.us.

New petition-review software

In 2017, the legislature passed a law that requires the Secretary of State to conduct signature verification on candidate petitions.¹ Therefore, in addition to reviewing voter registration information on petitions, we will now compare each petition signature with the signer's signature on file in the statewide voter registration database to determine whether the signatures match. We've developed software to accommodate this new requirement. The software is equipped with the same automatic signature-verification technology that several counties currently use for signature verification on mail-ballot return envelopes. The Petition Review section below includes a more-detailed description of the signature comparison process.

Petition format

Many candidates have already received approval from the Secretary of State to begin circulating. Included with each candidate's approval notice is the .pdf file containing the candidate's approved petition format. Because our new review software relies on scanned digital images of completed petitions, it is imperative that candidates use the approved petition format and follow the detailed petition-printing instructions included in the approval notice.² The Secretary of State will reject signatures affixed to anything other than the approved petition format.³

Submitting completed petitions to the Secretary of State

Candidates must deliver their completed petitions to the Secretary of State's office (1700 Broadway, Suite 200) no later than March 20th. We will not accept or count additional signatures filed after the candidate submits the completed petition.⁴ Because we anticipate receiving many petitions this year, we ask that candidates contact our office (jeffrey.mustin@sos.state.co.us) with the date and time of delivery. Upon receipt, we will consecutively stamp each petition section and provide the candidate with a receipt showing the total number of sections submitted.

¹ House Bill 17-1088 (<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb17-1088>).

² Election Rules 15.1.1 (a) and (b).

³ Election Rule 15.1.1 (c).

⁴ Election Rule 15.1.2.

Petition review

Pre-processing

Before reviewing signers' information on each petition, staff will scan the petition using high-speed scanners to create a digital image of every petition page. The review software then numbers each page and each signature line to establish the total number of lines for review.

Reviewing circulator affidavits

Staff will review the information on each circulator affidavit—including the notary jurat—for completeness and accuracy. For partisan candidate petitions, circulators must be affiliated with the same political party as the candidate. Staff will review the information on the affidavit to ensure that the circulator meets this requirement. If the affidavit is not complete or not accurate, staff will reject the entire petition section and all signatures on it.⁵

Curing rejected circulator affidavits

Under the new law passed in 2017, candidates may cure rejected circulator affidavits by submitting a new, correct circulator affidavit on a form provided by the Secretary of State.⁶ Once we have informed a candidate of the specific affidavits we rejected, the candidate has five calendar days from the date of the notice to cure the rejected affidavits.⁷ We will notify candidates of rejected circulator affidavits once staff has reviewed all affidavits submitted. This will generally happen before we've completed reviewing signatures on the petition. Once the candidate has cured a section with a rejected circulator affidavit, all otherwise valid signatures on the cured section will be accepted.

Processing signature lines

Staff will review each signature line to ensure that the person who signed it was eligible to sign the petition.⁸ For more detail about this review process, see Election Rule 15.1.4. There is no cure process for entries rejected because of wrong or missing information.

Signature verification

Under the new law, staff will compare each petition signature with the signer's signature on file in the statewide voter registration database to determine whether the signatures match.⁹ If staff or the review software's signature verification technology finds that a petition signature does not match the signature on file, a team of two staff members who are not affiliated with the same political party must conduct an additional review. During the second review, both staff members must agree that the signatures do not match in order to reject the petition entry.¹⁰

Curing rejected signatures

Candidates may cure signatures that the Secretary of State rejected as not matching.¹¹ To cure, the candidate must submit a form provided by the Secretary of State that includes the signer's affirmation that he or she signed the petition. The form must also include a copy of the signer's identification.¹² The candidate must submit the form within three days of receiving notice from the Secretary of State.

If you have questions or comments about the content of this document, please send them to ballot.access@sos.state.co.us.

⁵ See section 1-4-905, C.R.S.; Election Rule 15.1.3.

⁶ Section 1-4-912 (2), C.R.S.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ See section 1-4-904, C.R.S.

⁹ Section 1-4-908 (1.5), C.R.S.

¹⁰ Election Rule 15.7.

¹¹ Section 1-4-908 (1.5) (b) (II), C.R.S.

¹² For a list of acceptable identification, see section 1-1-104 (19.5), C.R.S.