

**June 11, 2015**

**VIA EMAIL**

Suzanne Staiert, Deputy Secretary of State  
Colorado Department of State  
1700 Broadway  
Denver, CO 80290

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Re: Watcher Advisory Panel, June 12 meeting public comment

Dear Deputy Secretary Staiert:

We are writing on behalf of the Election Oversight Committee of the Colorado Republican Party regarding election watcher activities in general, and specifically the critical importance of transparency and oversight of the signature verification process for mail ballots. We request that this public comment be delivered to all members of the Panel in advance of the June 12 meeting.

As the panel considers the importance of election oversight by authorized watchers, we request that the panel member reference the policy statement provided by the Colorado Republican Party supporting the principle currently in statute of watchers' rights to "witness and verify each step in the conduct of the election, and to assist in the correction of discrepancies." The party statement of dated May 14, 2015 is attached.

The right to verify and assist in the correction of discrepancies is essential in the signature verification process. In mail ballot elections, signatures are the only means of validating the voters' identity. The opportunity for fraud and abuse is rampant in mail ballot elections, and acknowledged by most election security experts, regardless of party affiliation. Voters and watchers' ability to challenge eligibility is not and should not be limited, regardless of the number or type of ballots challenged. Watchers must be able to challenge any mail ballot voter's signature—not merely a sample selected or restricted by election officials. By restricting watchers to inspection of only a sample of signatures or review the work of up to four separate signature verification stations simultaneously, the statutory rights of the watcher to "witness and verify EACH step in the conduct of the election," and

“assist in the correction of discrepancies,” or challenge mail ballot voters are improperly infringed.

Therefore, any constraints on the practical ability of the watchers to verify or challenge any signature they select (without foregoing their rights to review other signatures being simultaneously processed), are improper and conflict with statutory watchers’ rights.

We fully recognize the need of election officials to be able to effectively and efficiently count ballots. However, we also believe that fully complying with the law concerning the ability of watchers to verify and challenge signatures does not conflict with the ability of election officials to perform their job properly. Developing a system or procedures in advance of elections to accommodate the watchers and their ability to perform their duties should alleviate many concerns that election officials may have concerning watcher involvement.

I think we all can agree that election fairness and transparency are top priorities. It is essential that all candidates, issue committees and their supporters, regardless of political affiliation, be permitted to have equal access to challenge ineligible voters and incorrect decisions by election judges. Without full rights of all watchers to challenge the decisions of bi-partisan election judges, the election lacks fairness and transparency.

We are pleased to offer our comments, and appreciate the opportunity to do so to inform the work of the Watcher Advisory Panel. Please contact me or Marilyn Marks, Secretary of the Election Oversight Committee, [REDACTED] if you have questions. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Becky Mizel  
Chair, Election Oversight Committee  
Colorado Republican Party  
[REDACTED]

cc: The Honorable Wayne Williams, Colorado Secretary of State (via email)  
Steve House, Chair Colorado Republican Party (via email)  
Derrick Wilburn, Vice-Chair Colorado Republican Party (via email)  
Committee members: Al Kolwicz, Marilyn Marks, Ellyn Hilliard (to be confirmed),  
Marc Zarlengo. Legislative Liaison, -Charles Heatherly (via email)

Steven Ward, Dept of State, Elections Division