



Best Practices for Absentee Ballot Verification in Alaska

Building on bipartisan legislation considered in the 2022 Alaska legislative session, several bills introduced in 2023 have proposed implementing a signature match process for verifying absentee ballots. When combined with a robust cure process to allow voters to fix defects on their ballot envelopes, signature matching can be an effective and secure method for verifying absentee ballots.

Alaska should replace its existing witness/notary requirement with signature matching, as layering these two forms of ballot verification will impose unnecessary burdens and costs on Alaskan taxpayers and election administrators, with no additional security benefit.

Signature Matching is the Most Trusted Form of Ballot Verification Across the Nation.

Signature matching remains the most common and trusted way for states to verify absentee ballots across the country. As of January 2023, a majority of states use signature matching as their primary method of verifying returned absentee ballots. When combined with a robust cure process, signature matching is a reliable way for election officials to verify the identity of absentee voters without limiting voter access.

Witness/Notary Requirements are Uncommon, Especially Among Rural Western States.

Most states allow voters to return an absentee ballot by providing basic identifying information such as a voter's signature, address, and/or date of birth, including many rural western states with high absentee participation rates, such as Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. Witness/notary requirements are more burdensome for voters – particularly rural and senior voters – compared to other, equally effective forms of ballot verification like signature matching. Alaska is currently among only a handful of states in the nation that require voters to obtain a witness or notary signature before returning their ballot envelope.

Enacting Both Signature Matching AND Witness/Notary Requirements is Costly, Redundant Over-Regulation.

In states where voters are required to include a witness or notary signature on their ballot envelope, the notary or witness signature typically serves as the voter's proof of identity. Consequently, only one state imposes witness/notary requirements and *also* requires signature matching: Mississippi.¹ Layering these policies on top of each other would make Alaska an extreme national outlier and combine the worst of both worlds: not only would voters be subject to burdensome witness/notary requirements in order to return their ballot, local election officials would have to dedicate additional staff time and resources to verify both witness and voter signatures – all at taxpayer expense.

¹ Miss. Code § 23-15-633, Miss. Code § 23-15-639, Miss. Code § 23-15-641