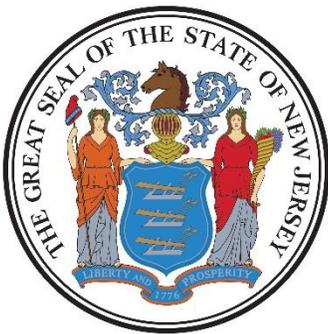


# **Guide to Signature Verification of Mail-In and Provisional Ballots and Cure of Discrepant or Missing Signatures**



# Table of Contents

<b>General</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Building Public Trust in Mail-In and Provisional Ballot Voting through Signature Verification ...	2
Setting the Table for Efficient Signature Comparison .....	2
Moving and Tracking Ballot Envelopes .....	3
Preparing the Workspace .....	5
<b>Staff Review</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Staff Review: Signature Verification Process .....	6
Staff Review: Accepted Ballots .....	7
Staff Review: Envelopes Not Accepted .....	7
<b>Board Review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Roles & Responsibilities .....	8
Batch Management .....	8
Room Preparation & Supplies .....	8
Board Review: Signature Verification, Acceptance and Rejection .....	8
<b>Signature Comparison</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Cure Process for Missing and Discrepant Signatures</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Creating the Cure List .....	10
Awaiting Cure: Envelope Storage and Organization .....	10
Issuance of the Letter to Voter to Cure a Signature Deficiency .....	10
Return of Cure Letter/Cure Form .....	11
Returned Cure Form Processing .....	11
Public Record Requests .....	12
Communication Efforts .....	12
Required Reporting .....	12
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Appendix A: Flow Chart of the Signature Verification Process .....	13
Appendix B: Letter to Voter to Cure a Signature Deficiency .....	14
Appendix C: Batch Information Sheet for use After Board Review .....	15

# General

---

## Building Public Trust in Mail-In and Provisional Ballot Voting through Signature Verification

Signature verification, the process of confirming each voter's identity by comparing the signature on the mail-in ballot certificate envelope or affirmation statement on the provisional ballot envelope to signatures captured in the voter's registration record, greatly enhances the security and integrity of the ballot process. When conducted consistently, efficiently and with transparency, signature verification improves public trust in the election by confirming that mail-in and provisional ballots returned are legitimate.

People do not sign their signature the same way every time. Signatures change over time and in different settings. Because variances are expected, significant points of agreement can be enough to confirm a match and accept the ballot.

Some signature variance will be too great to confirm a match. This does not mean fraud has been committed. **Failure to recognize that signature variation is normal can lead to disenfranchisement.**

The cause of the discrepancy may be an outdated signature in the voter's registration record. Some voters will forget to sign their return envelope altogether. Such scenarios underline the importance of giving voters a path to 'cure' or remedy the discrepancy, so every legally cast ballot may be counted.

Each County Board of Elections is advised to, at a minimum, meet in advance of Election Day and eight days after Election Day in order to discharge their duties pursuant to this guide, and to thereafter meet regularly in order to accomplish the same. Each County Board of Elections is also encouraged to hold these meetings in addition to any other statutorily mandated meetings of the Board.

## Setting the Table for Efficient Signature Comparison

### Roles & Responsibilities - Staff Review & Board Review

Election officials should expect vastly more mail-in and provisional ballots in the July 7, 2020 Primary Election than have been returned in past elections. Given this workload, this guide recommends a two-tiered process for signature verification. The first tier includes personnel conducting a review, which we shall call 'Staff Review' first, then flag any variant signatures for further examination by the Board of Elections ("Board"), referred to in this document as 'Board Review.'

The elections office may choose to designate staff for **Staff Review** who work individually or in pairs, or poll workers from different parties, keeping the goals of transparency, impartiality and efficiency in mind. Staff should reference all available signatures in the voter's registration record

when considering whether the signature is a match. The goal of Staff Review is triage—to review signatures on all ballot envelopes and accept all obvious matches, while flagging ballot envelopes with signature discrepancies to the Board for further review.

During **Board Review**, Board members will examine all ballot envelopes flagged for a possible signature discrepancy during Staff Review. The Board will make the ultimate decision whether to accept a signature and send the ballot for counting, or reject the signature and signal the start of the cure process for that voter.

One employee should be assigned the role of Batch Control staffer, who will be designated to assign batches of ballot envelopes for Staff Review, track batches using a log, accept and log completed batches, and rebatch ballot envelopes for Board Review and again for the cure process.

A schematic overview of the process can be seen in **Appendix A: Flow Chart of the Signature Verification Process**.

## Moving and Tracking Ballot Envelopes

Upon receiving ballots for processing and tabulation, your office should sort envelopes into batches. **This guide envisions batching ballots for signature verification without sorting them by election district. Boards whose voting equipment or procedures require counting in election district batches should adjust procedures and forms to match their needs.**

### Batch Information Sheet

Use **Batch Information Sheets** (see example on next page) from the point of intake. This should be attached to each batch. This sheet stays with accepted ballots straight through to tallying. This sheet is updated first by the Staff Review team doing Signature Verification, then later by teams opening envelopes and preparing ballots, and by those scanning ballots. This ensures that all accepted ballots are accounted for in later stages. The form accounts for envelopes removed from the batch because of issues identified in signature verification. It can be helpful to prefill batch numbers; and to print in triplicate in order to route copies for data entry.

## Batch Information Sheet

Batch Number: *(sequential #)*

Batch Creation Date:

### Signature Verification

Name:

Name:

Beginning Count	-	Missing Sig	=	Accepted Count

Verification count verified?

Initials:

Date:

Time:

### Ballot Preparation

Name:

Name:

Verification Count	-	Envelope Error	=	Adjusted Count

Opener count verified?

Initials:

Date:

Time:

### Ballot Scanning

Scanner ID:

Batch #:

Name:

Preparation Count	-	Removed for Duplication	=	Final Count

Scanner count verified?

Initials:

Date:

Time:

# Preparing the Workspace

When preparing a space for signature verification during the Covid-19 pandemic, take into account social distancing, sanitizing, ballot security, transparency and efficiency. Your ballot processing facility should offer:

- A Batch Control station with shelves, security carts and small mail trays for batches being examined and ballots moving to Board Review or Cure.
- Dedicated workstations for signature comparison, spaced safely apart, with room to operate a hand scanner and process all the ballots in a batch.
- Space for staff to check-out and return batches from a secure storage cart.
- Latex gloves are advised for workers handling envelopes.
- Large signs designating the Ballot Control station and Signature Verification Staff Review stations.



## Supplies

- Ballot trays (plastic postal trays are ideal)
- Tray labels: Accepted, Missing Signature, and Referred (on color-coded paper)
- Security carts or shelving (using tape or pool noodles to color-code)
- Signage designating Ballot Control station, workstations
- Signature Comparison poster and Quick-Review handouts
- Ample copies of forms:
  - Batch Information Sheet (Staff Review version and Board Review version)
  - Ballot Control Log
  - Rejected Ballot Log
- Hand scanners (where envelopes are bar-coded to pull up “Statewide Voter Registration System (“SVRS”) records)
- Pens (avoid blue/black to distinguish staff notations from voter’s writing)
- Rubber bands, binder clips, blank paper

Postal trays are useful for organizing and moving ballots. Keep in mind that a tray isn’t the same as a batch. Trays can hold multiple batches. Trays should hold only *one* category of ballot: Awaiting Staff Review, Accepted, Missing Signature, or Referred to Board.

# Staff Review

## Staff Review: Signature Verification Process

1. Each individual or team of Staff Review personnel should make contact with the Batch Control staffer to check out a batch of envelopes to be verified.
2. The Batch Control staffer records the batch assignment on the **Batch Control Log**.

Batch Control Log					
Date	Batch #	Assigned to:	Piece Count At Checkout	Check In (initial here when returned)	Accepted Ballots
06/12	0004	<b>Captain America</b>	100		
		<b>Iron Man</b>			

3. At Staff Review workstations, the individual or team begins to scan the barcode on each ballot return envelope, or enter voter identification into SVRS.
4. Verify the voter and compare the signature on the ballot envelope with the signature on file in the SVRS (according to County process).
5. Keep Accepted envelopes with the batch now, and through tally.
6. Hold envelopes with Missing & Discrepant Signature in separate bundles (clipped or rubber-banded and labeled. (see next section for handling.)
7. Complete the **Batch Information Sheet**.

- a. Enter the number of missing signatures and board referrals.
- b. Subtract from the Beginning Count to get the number of Accepted Ballots.

Batch Information Sheet					
Batch Number: <i>0005</i>			Batch Creation Date: <i>06/12/20</i>		
Signature Verification					
Name: <i>Captain America</i>					
Name: <i>Iron Man</i>					
Beginning Count	-	Missing Sig	Referred to Board	=	Accepted Count
<i>100</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>		<i>96</i>
Verification count verified?					Initials: <i>JM</i>
Date: <i>6/12/20</i>					Time: <i>11:45</i>

# Staff Review: Accepted Ballots

1. Return all accepted envelopes along with the **Batch Information Sheet** to the Batch Control staffer, who should initial the **Batch Control Log** to show it was returned, and enter the Accepted count.
2. Send Accepted trays to Ballot Preparation/Ballot Opening along with the **Batch Information Sheet**.

# Staff Review: Envelopes Not Accepted

1. The Batch Control staffer should group ballot envelopes that cannot be accepted in trays for Missing Signature or Referred to Board.
  - a. Use a red pen to write the rejection reason on the front of the ballot (Missing Signature: M; or Signature Discrepancy: D)
  - b. Include other relevant information, if any, that may be helpful to Board Review.
2. Group ballot envelopes that can't be accepted in trays as follows:
  - a. Move envelopes with missing signatures to a Missing Signature tray.
  - b. Move envelopes with signature discrepancy to the Referred to Board tray.
3. Complete the **Missing Signature / Board Referral Log**.
4. Periodically gather Referred to Board envelopes into a new batch for the Board
  - a. Create a new Batch Information Sheet using the Board Version (Appendix C)
  - b. Send the batch to the Board (or hold at Ballot Control till next Board Meeting.)
5. At the end of the day, or at reasonable intervals, perform piece counts to ensure:
  - a. The count of Accepted envelopes matches daily totals from Batch Control Log.
  - b. The count of Board Referral envelopes matches daily totals from the Missing Signature / Board Referral Log.

Missing Signature / Board Referral Log					
Date	Batch #	Staff Review Signatures	Missing Sig Count	Referral Count	Rejected by Board (Board batches only)
06/12	0001	<b>Captain America</b>	2	4	
		<b>Iron Man</b>			
06/12	0002	<b>Captain America</b>	1	3	
		<b>Iron Man</b>			
Daily Total:			3	7	

**Ballots rejected for missing signature are sorted separately and immediately sent to the cure process. Ballots with discrepant signatures are sorted separately for Board Review. Note: Never mix categories of ballots in the same tray.**

# Board Review

---

Since the process of Board Review is similar to Staff Review, parallel procedures and forms are recommended. This discussion will focus on points where Board Review procedures or forms may be different.

## Roles & Responsibilities

The Board receives ballot envelopes from the Staff Review process containing signatures the staff determine were not obvious signature matches. The Board will make a final determination on whether the signature is discrepant or matching.

The same person who is working as Batch Control staffer for Staff Review should manage batching, and track batches to and from Board Review.

A second person, trained on the signature verification process, should be designated as Board Review staffer, to help manage the process for the Board and complete necessary paperwork.

## Batch Management

Ballot envelopes referred for Board Review should be put into batches of manageable size, or in a single daily batch, as preferred. Each new batch needs a new **Batch Information Sheet**, substantially the same as used in Staff Review. To further distinguish Board Review batches, print this sheet on colored paper and use a special batch code (for instance, BR-0001, BR-00002, etc.) The Batch Information Sheet - Board Version is shown in Appendix C.

As with Staff Review batches, each batch should be checked out by the Batch Control staffer using the **Batch Control Log**, and checked back in when the Board has completed its work.

## Room Preparation & Supplies

The most important difference for Board Review set-up is the need to display each signature record for all Board members, while keeping social distancing in mind. Consider using a video display of the envelope and SVRS signatures if possible; provide gloves for Board members who handle and pass envelopes; or have a staffer hold up the envelope and printed copies of the SVRS signature(s) for examination.

## Board Review: Signature Verification, Acceptance and Rejection

1. Follow the procedures for Staff Review
2. Board members should consult any additional information written on the ballot envelope during Staff Review.

3. The Board Review staff assistant should record accepted and rejected in the **Batch Information Sheet**.

4. Staff assistant should return Accepted batches and Rejected envelopes to the Batch Control staffer, who will:

- a. Record numbers of Accepted envelopes in the Batch Control Log.
- b. Record numbers of Rejected Envelopes in the Missing Signature / Board Referral Log.
- c. Forward each group of envelopes to Ballot Preparation or the Cure Process.

5. At the end of the day, perform a piece count to ensure that the total number of ‘accepted’ and ‘rejected’ envelopes match what is shown in the Batch Control Log and the Missing/Referred Log.

Batch Information Sheet				
Batch Number: <i>0005</i>		Batch Creation Date: <i>06/12/20</i>		
Signature Verification				
Name: <i>Captain America</i>				
Name: <i>Iron Man</i>				
Beginning Count	–	Missing Sig	Referred to Board	= Accepted Count
<i>100</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>96</i>
Verification count verified?				Initials: <i>JM</i>
Date: <i>6/12/20</i>				Time: <i>11:45</i>

## Signature Comparison

When verifying signatures, evaluators should keep in mind that everyone writes differently, and no one signs their name exactly the same way twice. Some variation in signatures is to be expected. There are many factors that can lead to signature variance, including but not limited to age, disability, underlying health conditions, writing implement/surface, level of concentration, and educational background. Studies have shown that evaluators are more likely to declare genuine signatures to be non-genuine than they are to accept a non-genuine signature as genuine. We hope to prevent these errors. Evaluators should presume that the documents were signed by the same person and must accept a signature as valid unless there is a clear discrepancy that cannot be reasonably explained.

# Cure Process for Missing and Discrepant Signatures

---

When a voter's signature on a mail-in or provisional ballot envelope is missing, or does not match any signature in SVRS, the voter has an opportunity to "cure" the missing or discrepant signature.

## Creating the Cure List

1. An employee should be assigned the role of managing the cure process.
2. Ballot envelopes are received in batches from Staff Review (missing signatures) and also from Board Review (signature discrepancies).
3. A pending **Ballot Tracking Sheet** will accompany each batch of pending ballots.
4. If tracking manually, enter the name, address, today's date and reason for rejection into an Excel spreadsheet.
  - a. The critical importance of this list heightens the need for file back-up procedures, version control and security.

## Awaiting Cure: Envelope Storage and Organization

After the cure list has been created, ballot envelopes will need to be sorted into alphabetical order and stored by surname to allow for efficient retrieval when a Cure Form is returned.

1. Utilize mail trays and alphabetical card dividers.
2. Consider secure storage options that allow for daily access.

## Issuance of the Letter to Voter to Cure a Signature Deficiency

A customized Cure Letter (see **Appendix B - Letter to Voter to Cure a Signature Deficiency**) is sent to each voter with a postage paid return envelope. The body of the letter includes the Cure Form, which allows them to correct their signature deficiency. The letter must be issued by mail within 24 hours of identifying a missing signature or rejecting a ballot for a discrepant signature.

1. Create a mailing list either from the SVRS, or by manually entering voter information with rejected ballots into a spreadsheet.
2. Use the mailing list data to populate (i.e. mail-merge) the Cure Letter/Cure Form, along with mailing labels, if you are not using a window envelope.
3. Use the spreadsheet/ mailing list to track ballots held for missing or discrepant signatures.

# Return of Cure Letter/Cure Form

Cure Forms shall solicit the voter to:

1. Declare that they submitted their provisional or mail-in ballot;
2. Verify their identity by either:
  - i. Providing their Driver License Number or Motor Vehicle Commission Non-driver ID Number; or,
  - ii. If the voter does not have a Driver License Number or Motor Vehicle Commission Non-driver ID Number, providing the last four digits of their Social Security Number; or,
  - iii. If the voter does not have a Driver License Number, Motor Vehicle Commission Non-driver ID Number, or the last four digits of their Social Security Number, attach a legible copy of a state-accepted form of identification, which shall include a sample ballot which lists the voter's name and address; an official federal, State, county or municipal document which lists the voter's name and address; or a utility or telephone bill or tax or rent receipt; and
3. Sign and date the form prior to returning it.

If a voter attaches a copy of a State-accepted identification document to their Cure Form, the address listed on such document need not match the voter registration address provided that the document otherwise verifies the voter's identity.

Voters can return the signed Cure Form to the County Board of Elections in-person or by mail, email, or facsimile. The Cure Form must have the proper address, email address and facsimile number to which the voter can return the Cure Form. Cure Forms must be received by the Board of Elections in-person, by fax, or by email at or before 2:00 p.m. on July 23, 2020, or by mail such that it is received by the Board of Elections by close of business on July 23, 2020, to allow officials to include the ballot in the official canvass.

Under no circumstances may Cure Forms be verified or authenticated using Signature Matching.

## Returned Cure Form Processing

Once a signed Cure Form is received back from a voter, and the ballot is otherwise valid, the ballot should be counted.

This process will be most efficient if returned Cure Forms can be handled in bulk. Compile mailed Cure Letter and printouts of emails and faxes with signed Cure Forms along with copies of any provided ID.

1. For all Cure Forms received, a staff member should retrieve the pending mail-in or provisional ballot from the Rejected trays in secure storage.
2. Verify that the voter information on the returned Cure Form matches the voter information on the pending ballot.
3. Update the spreadsheet to remove voters who have resolved their signature issues.
4. Create batches of resolved ballot envelopes, which will move forward in the ballot process as accepted ballots.
5. Continue through the process until all Cure Forms are processed for the day.

Some voters will choose not to resolve their missing or discrepant signature. If a voter has not returned the Cure Form by the deadline, the unopened ballot envelopes and ballots will be stored per the New Jersey Retention Record Requirements.

## Public Record Requests

The list of voters who have a missing or discrepant signature should be made available through an Open Public Records Request. Stakeholders may request this list in order to contact voters and encourage them to complete the cure process, so that their ballot may be counted.

1. Inform requestors that the list will be provided 72 hours after the voter has been mailed their Cure Letter/Cure Form. This should provide adequate time for the election official to mail the Cure Letter/Cure Form, and for the voter to have received the Cure Letter/Cure Form.
2. Generate a tracking spreadsheet of voters for whom you are awaiting a Cure Form from the mailing list used to generate the letters.
3. When releasing the list, ensure that you are *excluding* confidential information, and only providing information about voters that is public under state law.
4. Include all previous days when providing this list to requestors, as it will be the most up-to-date list of voters who need to resolve issues with signatures. This will aid those using the list who wish to contact voters about their cure and ensure they do not contact voters who have already resolved their signatures.
5. As voters resolve their signature issues, remove them from the tracking list.

## Communication Efforts

Public messaging with voters, candidates, political organizations, civic organizations, community/neighborhood councils, HOA's, religious organizations, and third-party groups should be consistent and straightforward. These groups will attempt to contact voters if the voter becomes part of the Missing/Discrepant signature process. This can increase the number of voters taking advantage of the Cure Letter, but can also cause confusion for voters. When communicating to the public, include the timeline for voters to cure any missing or discrepant signatures, and make the message quick and easy to understand. Voters should be encouraged to resolve any issues quickly to have their ballot counted.

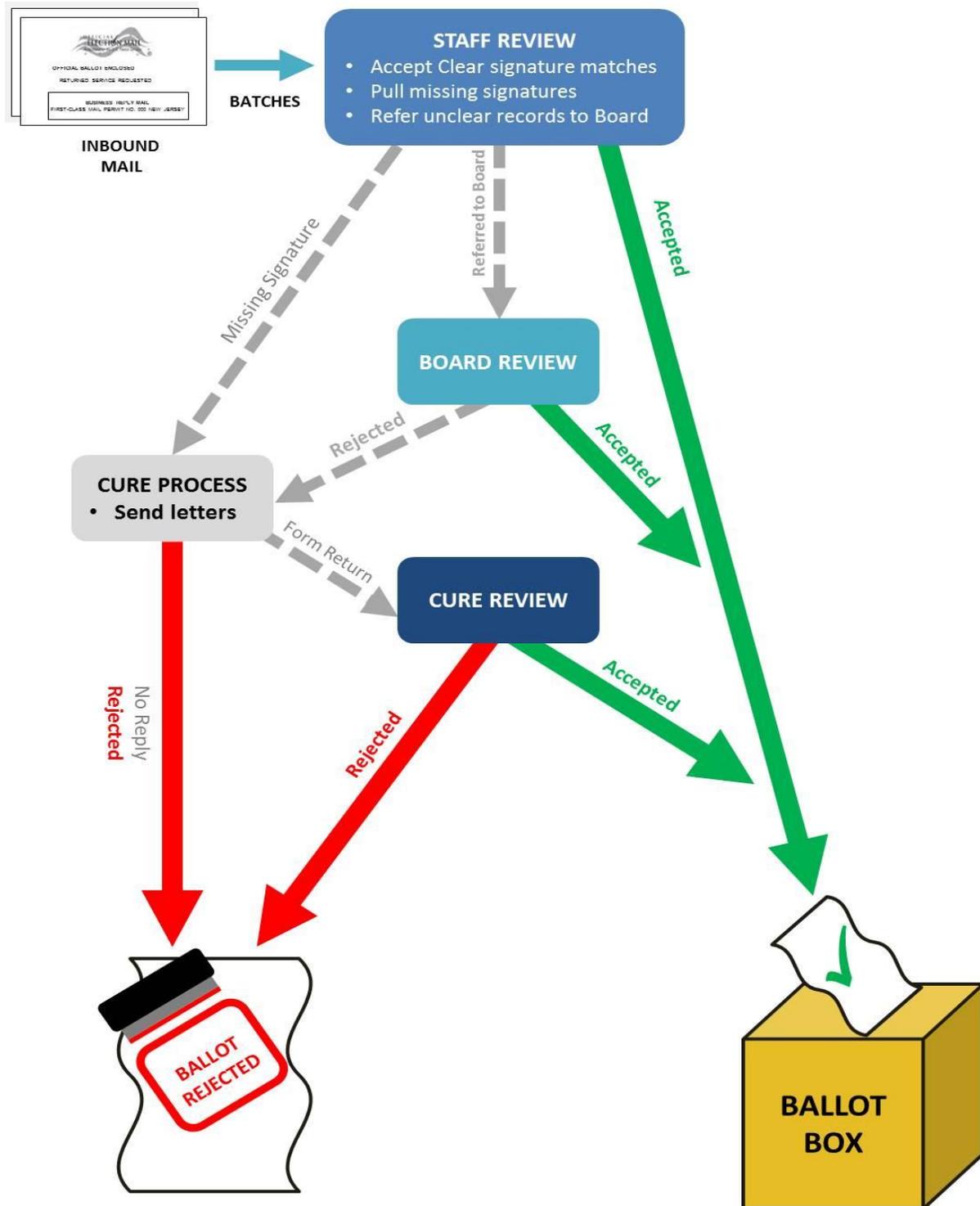
## Required Reporting

Each County Board of Elections must report to the Division of Elections the following information on July 15, 2020:

1. Whether the Board has completed reviewing all mail-in and provisional ballots and issued all required Cure Letters; and
2. If such processing has not been completed, (i) the number of mail-in and provisional ballots pending staff review; (ii) by when staff review of the received mail-in and provisional ballots will be completed; (iii) the number of mail-in and provisional ballots that have been set aside for County Board of Elections review, but have not yet been acted on by the Board, and (iv) when the Board intends to meet to process those ballots.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Flow Chart of the Signature Verification Process



## Appendix B: Letter to Voter to Cure a Signature Deficiency

<<DATE>>

Dear <<FIRST\_NAME>>

We received your voted ballot for the 2020 Primary Election. **Unfortunately, your ballot envelope <<did not have a signature OR we were unable to verify your signature with those on file>>.**

New Jersey Election Law requires us to compare the signature on your ballot envelope with the signatures in your voter registration record to verify your identity. For your ballot to count, you must complete and return the Cure Form. This form must be received by the Board of Elections in-person, by fax, or by email at or before 2:00 p.m. on July 23, 2020, or by mail such that it is received by the Board of Elections by close of business on July 23, 2020. If you indicate that you have not voted a ballot, or you fail to return the form, we will not count the ballot.

Please be advised that if you return the signed Cure Form, we will update your voter registration record to include this signature. We hope you reply soon so your vote may be counted. If the ballot received in your name was not from you, please contact this office immediately.

Sincerely,

[Jurisdiction Signatory]

---

**Instructions:** Return this signed and form, along with a copy of your identification, if applicable, in-person, or by mail, email or fax using the contact information below.

**Mail**

**Fax**

**Email**

[Enter Jurisdiction Name] (xxx) xxx-xxxx

[Email addr]

[Jurisdiction Address 1]

[City, State, Zip]

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [Preprinted voter name] \_\_\_\_\_, hereby declare that I submitted my provisional or mail-in ballot. I am verifying my identity by (choose one):

\_\_\_\_\_ My Driver License Number is \_\_\_\_\_ or Motor Vehicle Commission Non-driver ID Number is \_\_\_\_\_; or,

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not have a Driver License Number or Motor Vehicle Commission Non-driver ID Number. The last four digits of my Social Security Number are \_\_\_\_\_; or,

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not have a Driver License, Motor Vehicle Commission Non-driver Identification, or Social Security Number, and am attaching a legible copy of a sample ballot which lists my name and address; an official federal, State, county or municipal document which lists my name and address; or a utility or telephone bill or tax or rent receipt which lists my name and address;

and, I wish to cure the signature deficiency in the record so my ballot can be cast and counted.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of voter)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix C: Batch Information Sheet for use after Board Review

Batch Information Sheet (Board Review version)			
Batch Number: <i>(prefill with BR-XXXX)</i>		Batch Creation Date:	
Signature Verification			
Name:			
Name:			
Beginning Count	-	Rejected	= Accepted Count
Verification count verified?			Initials:
Date:			Time:
Ballot Preparation			
Name:			
Name:			
Verification Count	-	Envelope Error	= Adjusted Count
Opener count verified?			Initials:
Date:			Time:
Ballot Scanning			
Scanner ID:		Batch #:	
Name:			
Preparation Count	-	Removed for Duplication	= Final Count
Scanner count verified?			Initials:
Date:			Time: