

# ***Ensuring Every Vote Counts: California's Signature Curing Process***

***California State Senate Elections and Constitutional  
Amendments Committee Hearing  
March 18, 2025***

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*Improving the  
ballot curing  
process requires  
state help,  
state funding and  
consistency*

## ***How?***

- Reduce the **need** to cure ballots by reducing ballot rejection
- Ensure voters are **treated equally** when their ballots are challenged
- Improve the signature curing **process.**

## *Ballot rejection reforms, 2015-2024*

2015: signatures can be accepted on a separate piece of paper

2016: Voter's Choice Act counties must notify and give voters the chance to cure missing and mismatched signatures

2017: ACLU lawsuit challenging the legality of signature rejection; court victory in 2018

2018: court decision codified; voters must be notified of challenged signatures and provided opportunity to cure before results are certified

2018: Counties required to provide voters with postage-paid ballot return envelopes

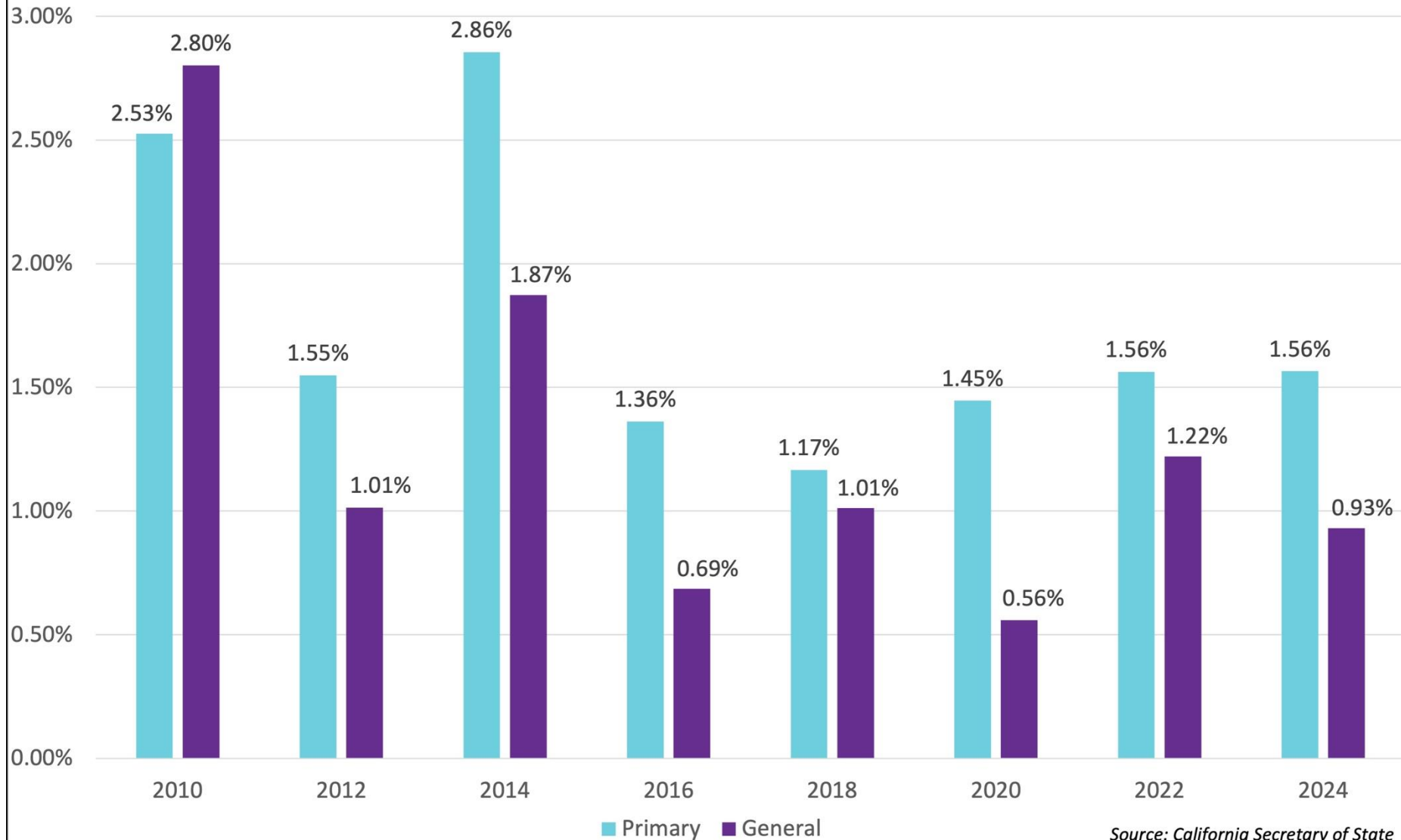
# *Ballot rejection reforms, 2015-2024*

## Additional reforms enacted:

- Counties must notify voters with missing signatures and give them a chance to cure
- A three-day grace period (now seven) was implemented to reduce rejection due to lateness, allowing ballots to be counted if postmarked by Election Day
- Counties must use Intelligent Mail barcodes to enable ballot tracking and verify the ballot return date when postmarks are missing
- Ballot tracking and notifications via email and text
- Counties must return out of county ballots they receive to those voters' home counties, and they get counted
- Design improvements were made to the ballot return envelope
- Voters can submit a cure signature by text or email



## Percentage of California Vote-by-Mail Ballots Rejected, 2010-2024



Source: California Secretary of State



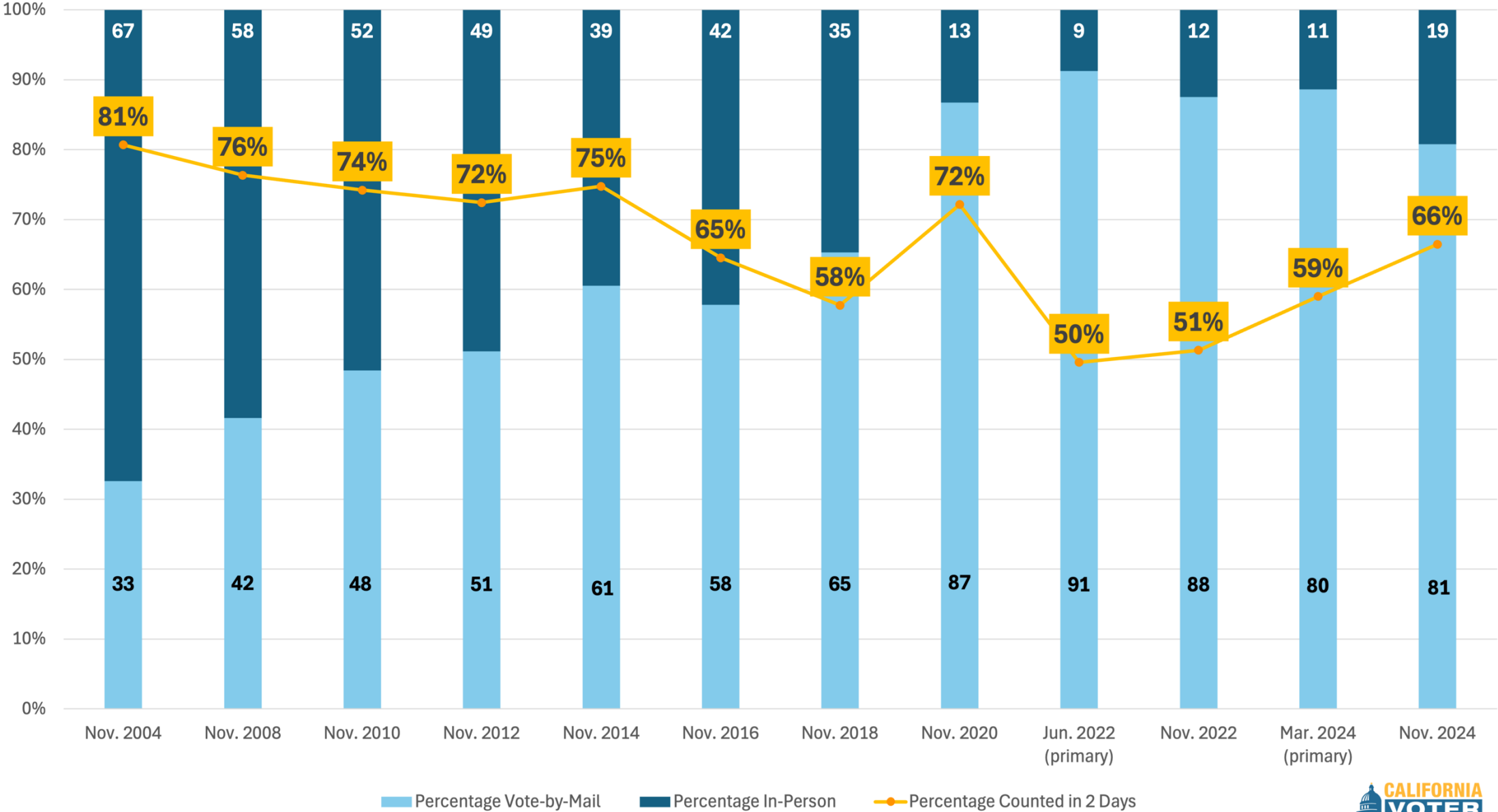


# Close Count Transparency Project

*Monitoring results in  
California's close elections*

[www.calvoter.org/closecount](http://www.calvoter.org/closecount)

# California Voting Methods and Percentage of Ballots Counted Two Days After Election in Elections Held Between 2004 - 2024





# *2020 General Election highlights:*

“Pandemic” election – atypical

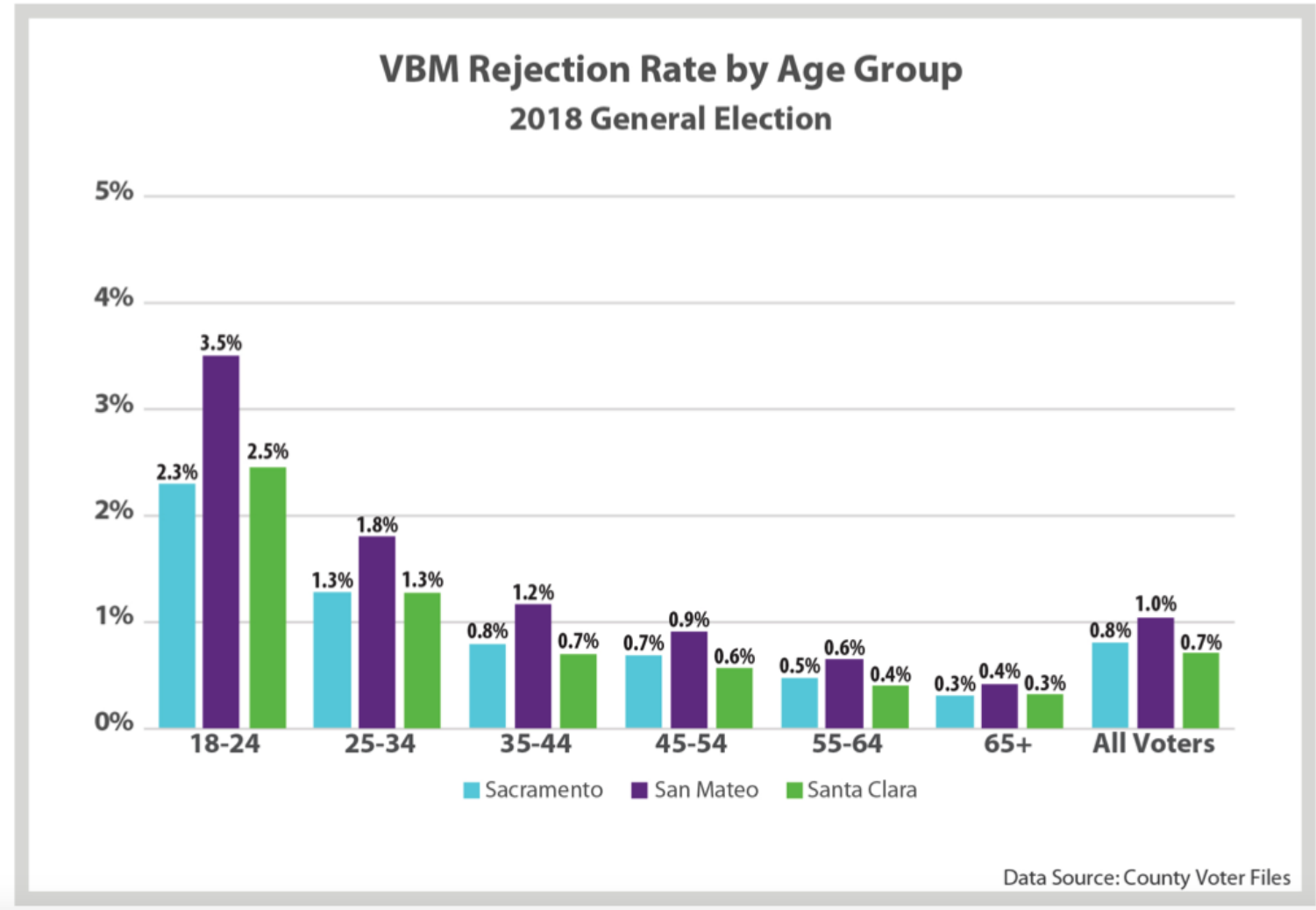
- This election saw the lowest rejection rate in the past 16 elections
- Also saw a faster ballot counting rate than other recent elections

Why? Atypical election but also...

- Secretary of State undertook a \$35 million public information campaign educating voters how to cast a vote-by-mail ballot and urging voters to get their ballots in early
- Illustrates how public education and outreach can result in faster returns and less voter errors.

# 2020 CVF/CID Ballot Rejection study found:

*Young voters and first-time voters are far more likely to have their ballots rejected than voters overall.*



## *Reduce the need to cure ballots:*

⇒ Help voters make **fewer mistakes**

⇒ Increase the percentage of ballots cast as **in-person ballots** that don't require signature verification

⇒ Increase access to **early voting** for all voters

- Consistent guidance for how to address or correct a mistake needs to be provided by the Secretary of State and included in election materials sent to voters by the state and each county.
- When voters make mistakes, we need to tell them, follow up, and make sure they don't keep doing it.
- Supervisors should review a challenged signature before the voter is notified.

# *Reduce the need to cure ballots by increasing ballots cast that do not require signature verification*

⇒ All voters should have the right to cast their vote-by-mail ballots as an in-person ballot (AB 626)

- The state should provide the training, resources and guidance counties need to implement this service consistently and securely
- Data needs to be compiled on implementation of AB 626

⇒ Ensure all voters, and not just those living in Voter's Choice Act counties, can vote early in person the weekend before Election Day

*Ensure voters are treated equally when their ballots are challenged*

*Nov. 2024 counties with the ten highest rejection rates (2.54 - 1.57%)*

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<b>County</b>	<b>Percent Rejected</b>	<b>Number Rejected</b>
Imperial	2.54%	924
San Benito	2.49%	615
Del Norte	2.41%	222
Trinity	1.91%	106
Modoc	1.75%	65
Colusa	1.72%	125
Tehama	1.72%	392
Yuba	1.66%	427
Yolo	1.58%	1,290
Lake	1.57%	376



*Nov. 2024 counties with the ten lowest rejection rates (0.53 – 0.17%)*



County	Percent Rejected	Number Rejected
San Francisco	0.53%	1,878
Solano	0.48%	757
Lassen	0.46%	51
Santa Clara	0.45%	3,013
Alpine	0.40%	3
Mendocino	0.38%	143
Santa Cruz	0.38%	444
Sutter	0.31%	111
Inyo	0.18%	13
Amador	0.17%	34

# *12 ways to improve the signature curing process*

1. Ensure counties are fully complying with signature verification **regulations**
2. Give counties the **funding** they need to facilitate signature curing
3. Require signature curing **technology** to be **tested and certified** like other voting equipment and make sure it is deployed fairly by establishing **uniform standards** and regulations for its use
4. Improve the ability of counties to verify signatures by giving them **access to DMV signatures**
5. Shift from a bottom-up to **top-down statewide voter registration database** and enable counties to more easily access other counties' correspondence with voters that can provide additional signatures to compare
6. Develop **new state regulations** for turning in a ballot as an in-person voter and for texting or emailing in a signature to cure a ballot

# *12 ways to improve the signature curing process*

7. Require counties to have **written procedures** in place to govern the curing process
8. Create a standardized **statewide form all voters can use** for submitting a ballot cure signature
9. Hold **annual trainings** as required by state regulations to ensure senior election staff are informed how to compare signatures and aware of state laws and requirements
10. Add to the **ballot return envelope guidance** to voters to “make your signature look like your driver’s license or California ID signature if you have one”
11. Urge voters to **turn in ballots earlier** through voter education and outreach (if there is a problem, voters are more likely to address it before elections results are known)
12. Require counties to **reach out to voters** for a new signature if their ballot is rejected.