

Improving Signature Verification and Curing Processes in California

California provides one of the most robust voting systems in the United States by utilizing both expansive options for vote-by-mail and the in person vote center model. While VBM has increased voter turnout during 2020, 2022, and 2024, **more than 100,000 California voters were disenfranchised** over that same time period due to “discrepancies” or “changes” in their signature and never cured their ballot (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

This matters because these thousands of rejected ballots can make the difference in close elections. In Orange County more than 8,500 signatures¹ were rejected in November 2022, and Anaheim had a city council election decided by just 78 votes. Furthermore, studies show that racial bias influences signature rejections, with Black, Latino and Asian American voters having their ballots disproportionately rejected.² While election officials are required to presume that a signature on a ballot is that voter’s signature,³ it is unclear if officials actually adhere to such requirements. Furthermore, the lack of regulation of signature verification technology can also leave voters susceptible to being rejected incorrectly.

The UCLA Voting Rights Project has conducted extensive research on signature rejection on mail ballots and we propose the following to ensure all Californians have equal voting rights:

1. Similar to Washington state, the legislature require a County-level audit every election cycle of the signature verification process to review: (a) the rate at which ballots are rejected for signature reasons by race and ethnicity, by county, and (b) the rate at which voters who have been rejected cure their signatures by race and ethnicity, by county
2. The legislature should require an audit every election cycle of the signature verification process to review (a) election official adherence to signature verification standards, (b) review of signature verification technology, (c) review of training of election staff conducting signature verification, (d) overview of the cure process and outreach to voters regarding signature mismatch curing procedures.
3. Increased ballot tracking by requiring every county in California to use a ballot tracking system.⁴

¹ In Table 2 of the Appendix we show that there were multiple 2022 and 2024 California congressional races decided by fewer votes than there were signature rejections in those same counties/districts.

² Washington State Auditor, *Evaluating Washington’s Ballot Rejection Rates- Audit Results* (Feb 2022), at 18, https://sao.wa.gov/sites/default/files/audit_reports/PA_Evaluating_WA_Ballot_Rejections_ar-1029711.pdf.

³ “The comparison of a signature shall begin with the basic presumption that the signature on the petition or ballot envelope is the voter’s signature”. - Cal. Elec. Code § [20960](#).

⁴ Currently, voters may have to call their county elections office to see if their ballot was counted and if not, the reason why. See <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status>.

4. Modernization of curing procedures by implementing new curing methods such as text-to-cure, robocall to cure, and allowing voters to email or text their cure sheet to county election staff.
5. Preemptively mail signature “update” forms to all registered voters before general elections.
6. Improved training for all persons who review signatures
7. Require counties to provide a 3-person unanimous agreement to reject a ballot signature, with rationale or justification for rejection reason.
8. Commission an Automatic Signature Verification (ASV) vendor test from the National Institute of Standards and Technology to assess the accuracy and bias of the ASV vendors California counties often partner with.⁵

⁵ Stanford Law School, *Signature Verification and Mail Ballots: Guaranteeing Access While Preserving Integrity* (May 2020), see Appendix 3.
https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SLS_Signature_Verification_Report-5-15-20-FINAL.pdf

Appendix

Table 1: Signature Rejection in the 2022 General Election

Year	Election	County	Total Signature Rejections
2022	General	Fresno	1,865
2022	General	Madera	108
2022	General	Merced	169
2022	General	Orange	8,508
2022	General	Riverside	4,184
2022	General	San Joaquin	1,008
2022	General	Stanislaus	878
2022	General	ALL 58 COUNTIES	47,265
2020-2024	General	ALL 58 COUNTIES	>100,000

Table 2: Close California Elections 2022-2024

Year	Election	Race	Winning Candidate	Losing Candidate	Margin
2022	General	Los Alamitos City Council District 5	Emily Hibard	Randy Hill	4
2022	General	Huron City Council	Mike Morales	Joe Zavala	7
2022	General	Firebaugh City Council	Felipe Perez	Linda Espinoza	15
2022	General	Coalinga City Council District 1	Adam Adkisson	Roger Schindler	17
2022	General	Anaheim City Council District 2	Carlos Leon	Gloria Sahag'un Ma'ae	78
2024	General	United States Representative District 13	Adam Gray	John Duarte	187
2022	General	Orange Unified School District Trustee Area 4	Madison Miner	Kathy Moffat	221
2022	General	Orange City Mayor	Dan Slater	Mark Murphy	434
2022	General	South Orange County Community College	Terri Rydell	Derek Reeve	454
2024	General	State Assembly Member District 58	Leticia Castillo	Clarissa Cervantes	596
2024	General	United States Representative District 32	Derek Tran	Michelle Steele	653
2024	General	State Senate District 9	Laura Richardson	Michelle Chambers	2,418
2024	General	State Assembly Member District 74	Laurie Davies	Chris Duncan	3,870