

HB212: Election Law - *Signature Verification of Absentee Ballots and Absentee Ballot Applications and Ballot Canvassing*

FEBRUARY 2, 2022

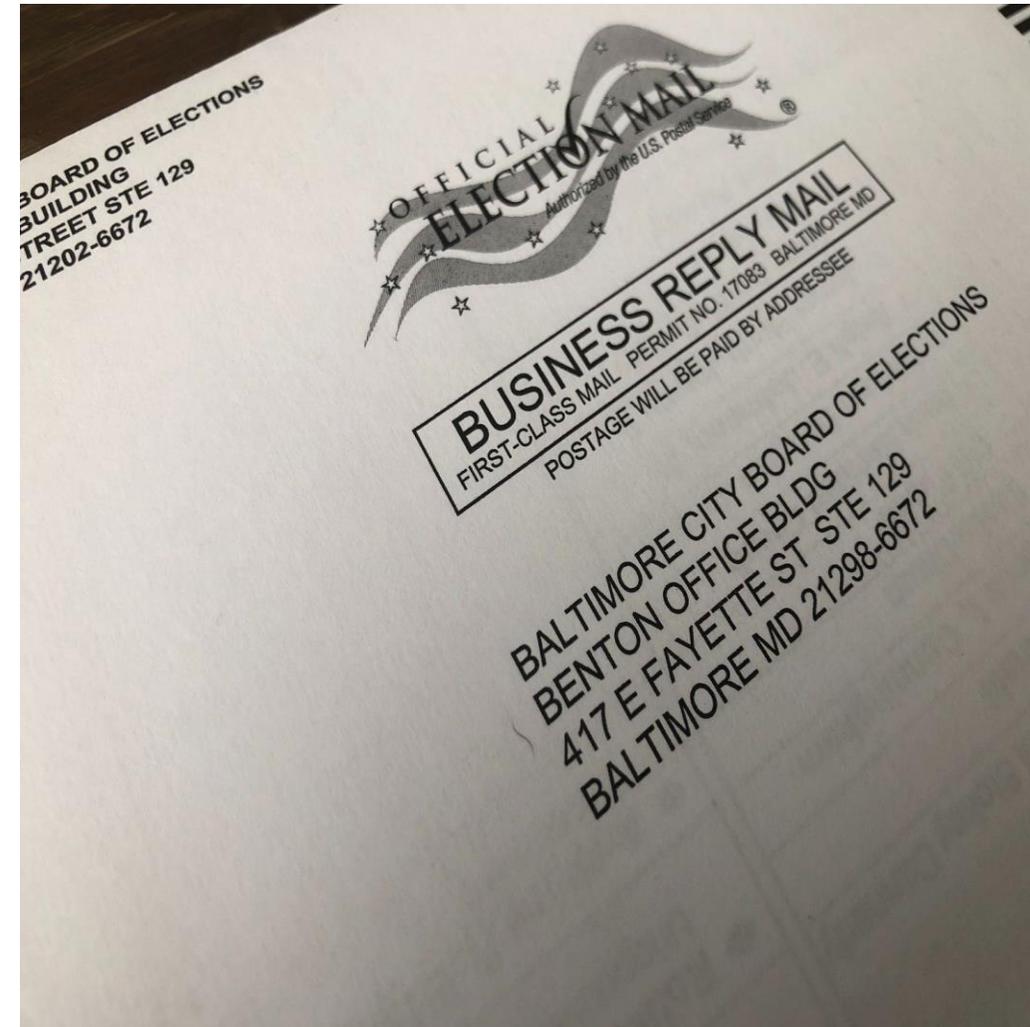
WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

DELEGATE NEIL PARROTT

“The identity of every ballot can be verified through signature verification. In a sense, a signature is a form of biometric identification, i.e. it is unique to a particular voter. By having a voter sign an affidavit on a ballot envelope the voter is affirming that the ballot enclosed is their ballot.”

“Election officials can verify the signature as well. When combined with an effective “cure process,” or opportunity for a voter to fix a mismatched or missing signature, signature verification is an effective way to verify a voter’s identity.”

NCSL, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-14-how-states-verify-voted-absentee.aspx>



Problem:

- Right now, there is no process to compare signatures to voter registration forms.
- 32 states and the District of Columbia require election officials to compare signatures on absentee ballots.
- Maryland is one of eighteen states that do not verify the identity of voters on mail-in ballots.

WUSA9, Matt Gregory, September 23, 2020,
<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/verify/mail-in-ballot-signatures-required-in-dc-maryland-and-virginia-matching-signatures/65-1176cdfb-3da4-4905-9a9a-bb472e935de7>



31

States and DC DO match signatures, and DO check to fix mismatches

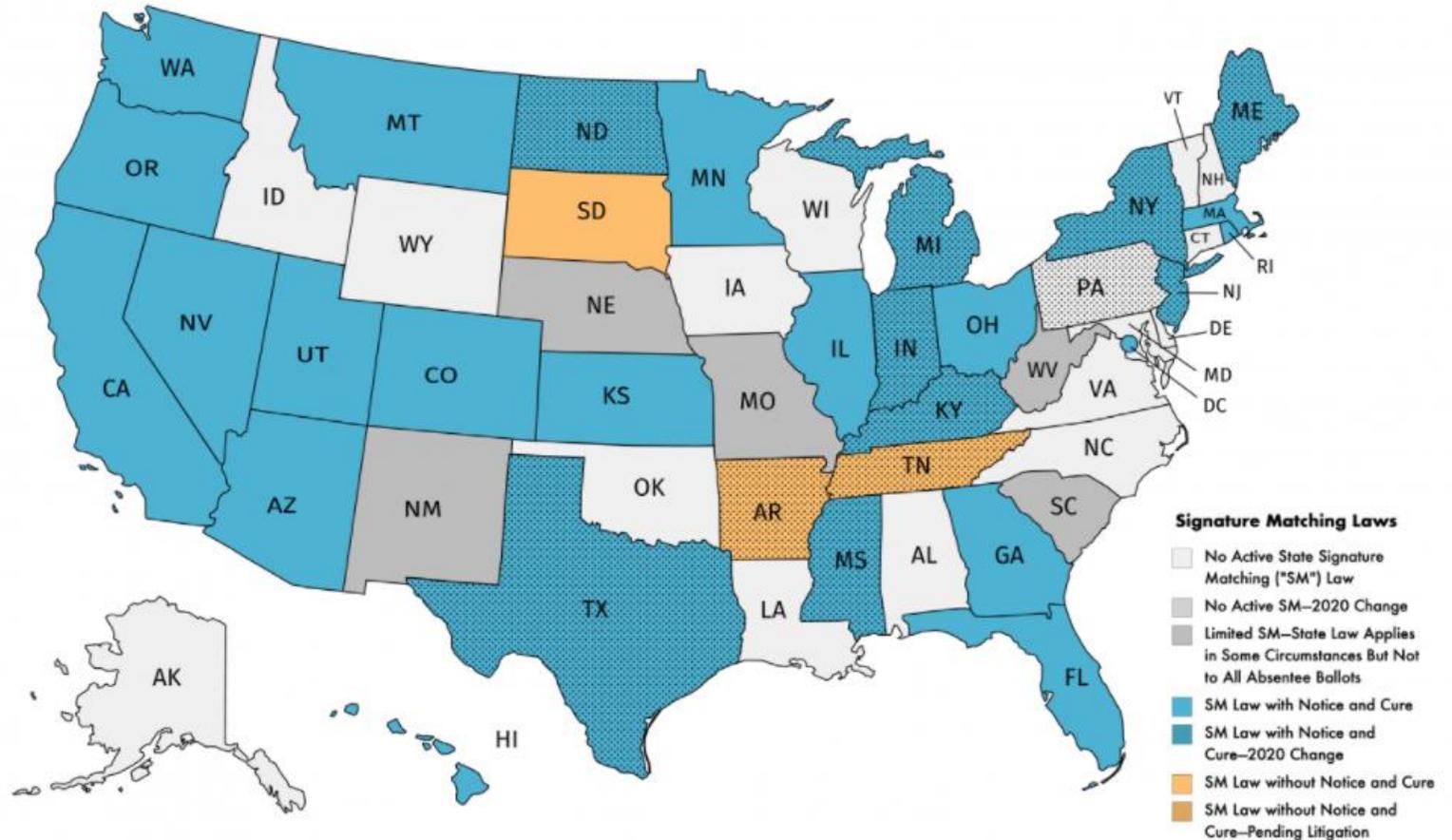
3

States DO match signatures , but do not check to fix mismatches

16

States do not match signatures

States that have Signature Validation Laws (2020)



Source: Campaign Legal Center, <https://campaignlegal.org/update/signature-matching-and-mail-ballots-safeguards-ensure-every-vote-counts>

About Signature Verification:

- Signature verification software was developed more than 15 years ago for the banking industry (NY Times).
- *Note: if we validate signatures on checks, why not our absentee ballots?*
- States with automated signature verification often use Parascript software, which is compatible with Panasonic scanners.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/10/07/upshot/mail-voting-ballots-signature-matching.html>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-ballot-signatures-softwa/factbox-u-s-counties-using-automated-signature-verification-software-idUSKCN26F1U4>

<https://na.panasonic.com/us/trends/confronting-votings-new-normal-ballot-scanning-and-signature-verification-technology>

What this bill does:

Two-step process:

- Step 1: checks signatures for absentee ballot requests that are submitted by mail.
- If the absentee ballot request's signature does not match with the BOE registration record, the BOE contacts the voter who requested the ballot and directs them to submit an additional form of identification such as driver's license, social security card, voter registration card, etc. in order to be approved to have the ballot mailed to them.
- Please note that the online process remains the same. In this case, a driver's license number is required and no signature is needed.

Maryland Application for a Mail-In Ballot
2020 Presidential General Election

Register to Vote

1 You must be registered to vote a mail-in ballot. If you are not registered, go to www.maryland.gov/elections to register. If you are already registered, you must provide your current address and date of birth to the State Board of Elections. If you are not registered, you must provide your current address and date of birth to the State Board of Elections.

About you

2 First Name
3 Last Name
4 Email Address
5 Birthdate

How do you want to receive your ballot?

U.S. MAIL
 I want my ballot delivered to my home address.
 Same as above
 Address
 City/Town
 State
 ZIP Code

INTERNET DELIVERY
I want my ballot delivered to my email address.
Email address: _____
Maryland Driver's License or ID card: _____
Issue Date: _____
Last 4 digits of Social Security Number: _____

FAX
fax number: _____

Signature (required)
Anyone can help you fill out this form except:
• A candidate on your ballot
• Your employer or an agent of your employer
• An officer or agent from your union

Voter's Signature (required)
Today's Date: _____

Assistance Signature (required if you had help)
Under penalty of perjury, I hereby certify that this voter needed help with this form because he or she has a disability or is unable to read or write. The voter authorized me to complete this form. If the voter could not sign this form, I printed the voter's name and wrote my initials.

sign: _____
print: _____

Handwritten Note:
If you have a Maryland driver's license or ID card, we ask you to use the online system to request a ballot. We can process your request more quickly, and we do not have to worry about reading your handwriting.
How will I receive my ballot?
The best way to receive your ballot is to ask us to mail it to you. We can send it to any address you want. Voting a ballot that you get in the mail helps us speed up the vote count and keep election workers safe during the pandemic. We will also send you an envelope with prepaid postage. No postage necessary!
You can also pick it up in person or have someone pick it up. You should ask your local election office how to pick it up in person.
• If you want someone to pick up your ballot for you, you need to provide a Designation of Agent form. Get this form at your local election office or online at elections.maryland.gov/voting/absentee.html.
• The person who picks up your ballot must be at least 18 years old and cannot be a candidate on your ballot. You can also have a similar person return your voted ballot to your local election office. This person must sign a form to show that he or she handed the ballot properly.
If you cannot receive a ballot in the mail or pick it up in person, we can also deliver your ballot over the internet. This process slows down the vote counting after the election and puts election workers at risk during the pandemic, so we ask that you not use internet delivery unless it is necessary.
If you need to access your ballot on the internet, you must:
• Provide us with your email address.
• Print your ballot and return it to your local election office. You cannot return your voted ballot online or by taking it to your local election office. You cannot return your voted ballot online.
• Mailed ballots are counted quicker than your printed ballot.

Step 2:

- This step verifies the signature on the outside envelope of the returned ballots before any counting is performed.
- To verify the signatures an electronic verification is used by comparing the signature on the envelope to the state's voter registration recorded signature.
- Should a ballot be in question, BOE will contact the voter and ask them to verify the ballot or explain signature (e.g. broken arm, stroke, name change, etc.)



Benefits of the Program

- Helps ensure the integrity of our election process.
- Gives Maryland voters a sense of confidence in their votes.
- With questionable ballots, alerts the voter so that they will still be able to vote.

Please vote yes on HB 212

Questions?