VOTE-BY-MAIL SYSTEM IN SALT LAKE COUNTY, UTAH
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March 11, 2021

Salt Lake County began implementing a vote-by-mail system in 2013 after the Utah Law was changed to allow for federal, state, and municipal elections to be conducted mainly by mail in conjunction with in-person voting. Prior to the law change, I had offered a Permanent Absentee Program which allowed voters to submit an application and opt to receive their ballots by mail. By 2012, about one fourth of the voters in Salt Lake County (130,000) were signed up for our Permanent Absentee Program.

We utilize the National Change of Address (NCOA) list and update addresses weekly for voters who have moved within the county, so ballots are mailed to their current address. We also use NCOA to identify voters who have moved out of the state or county so we can avoid mailing ballots to voters who are no longer eligible to vote in Salt Lake County. We change the status of those voters to "inactive" and mail them a confirmation card.

HOW BALLOTS ARE ORDERED FOR VOTERS

All registered voters are listed in a statewide database (VISTA) which is managed by the Lt. Governor's Office. Voters are assigned a voter ID number. Lists of eligible active registered voters are submitted to our ballot printing vendor, Runbeck of Phoenix, Arizona. They prepare a ballot packet for each voter listed on the extracts. Every ballot ordered contains a unique 9-digit ID number correlated to the voter listed in the database.

If a voter moved, misplaced, or ruined their ballot and another ballot needs to be ordered, a new ballot with a different ID number is assigned to that voter's record. The previous ballot and coinciding ballot ID number is *spoiled* or canceled in the database before another ballot is ordered. If the voter returned the spoiled ballot, the Agilis ballot processing machine would reject the spoiled ballot. Agilis reads the bar code on the ballot return envelope and correlates it to the voter's record in the database where it is recorded if a voter has returned their ballot. Only one ballot per voter is eligible to be counted.

Ballot packets are prepared by Runbeck. The initial batch of ballots for the majority of voters (592,000 ballots for the 2020 General Election) are trucked to the Salt Lake Post Office where they are mailed in accordance with the state law. The law does not allow us to mail ballots earlier than 21 days prior to Election Day. As voters registered or moved and their address was updated, subsequent ballot packets were ordered by submitting extracts to Runbeck ongoing until the deadline – eleven days prior to Election Day.

HOW BALLOTS ARE PROCESSED WHEN THEY ARE RETURNED

Voters may return their ballot by mail. Ballots returned by mail must be <u>postmarked by the day before</u> Election Day in accordance with Utah state law. Ballots may be returned to one of our twenty-one drive-up ballot drop boxes (open 24/7), or in person at an Early Voting or Election Day vote center until 8:00 pm on Election Day. When a ballot is received at the Election Management Center (EMC), the tab on the ballot return envelope affidavit is removed so the voter's signature is revealed. On first pass, ballots are run through the AGILIS ballot processing machine. The bar code printed on

the ballot return envelope is scanned and the ballot is correlated to the voter's record in the database where the status of the ballot is recorded.

AGILIS takes a high-speed image of the ballot envelope, including the affidavit signature. The captured signature is compared to the reference signature in the voter's record by the automated ASR system (Automated Signature Recognition). In the November General Election, about 52% of the signature verification was done with ASR. Signatures that cannot be verified using the ASR are compared manually by trained staff members. We routinely audit signature verification on both manual and ASR versions.

Staff members doing "sig ver" do not need to handle ballots since the signature on the ballot affidavit and that from the voter's record are displayed digitally. Ballots remain locked in a vault while the manual signature verification process takes place. If the signature does not match on the first pass, it is sent to a higher level of staff who can access other documents in the voter's record to use for comparison. There are usually several documents on file for voters such as previous voter registration forms, absentee applications, etc. After the higher-level signature review is complete, the second pass or audit pass is run in AGILIS. This allows ballots with signature challenge issues to be removed. For ballots where there is a signature discrepancy, a cure letter is mailed to the voter within 24 hours of the decision, and they have an opportunity to resolve the issue so their ballot can be counted. Voters for whom we have mobile phone numbers and email addresses are also notified of a signature problem by text or email.

Ballots that are verified are passed through to the OPEX machine to be opened. The OPEX machine runs ballots in a rapid assembly-line fashion. It slices open the end of ballot return envelopes. The OPEX machine operator removes the security sleeve containing the ballot from the envelope. The ballot remains folded inside the security sleeve. The ballot return envelope is dropped into a bin beneath the OPEX Machine. The secrecy of the ballot is maintained throughout this process. All identifiers to the voter are separated.

Ballot inspectors remove ballots from the security sleeves and unfold them in preparation for them to be tabulated. By-mail ballots are placed in ballot boxes in batches of 150 and are labeled and tracked. As ballots are tabulated, the ballot batches are logged into a database and they are reconciled to ensure every ballot is accounted for.