



27<sup>th</sup> Annual  
National Conference San  
Antonio, TX

## 2011 Professional Practices Program

### VOTE BY MAIL “MAKING EVERY VOTE COUNT”

Butte County, California

Submitted by:

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**BUTTE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

**VOTE BY MAIL  
"MAKING EVERY VOTE COUNT"**

Submitted for Consideration to:

**Election Center  
Professional Practices Program  
2011**

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# **Butte County, California**

## **Vote by Mail Ballots (formerly Absentee)**

### **Making Every Vote Count**

#### **Overview**

California law allows any voter to request a ballot by mail. The increased number of voters who choose to vote by mail creates unique issues due to the sheer volume. Butte County Elections Office, like other elections offices, strives to lessen the number of returned mail ballots which have to be challenged and cannot be counted.

The three most common reasons for a challenged vote by mail ballot are: 1) the voter did not sign the return envelope; 2) the signature on the return envelope does not match the signature on the voter's registration card; 3) the returned ballot is received after election day.

In an effort to make sure that every possible ballot received is counted, extra measures are taken to contact the voter regarding missing or mismatched signatures.

Additionally, contact and coordination is made with the local post offices to alleviate the number of vote by mail ballots returned too late to be counted.

#### **Vote by Mail Call Center**

Our election management computer software has a special feature which places the names of voters whose ballot has been challenged in a "Call Center Processing" module. Depending on the challenge reason, a letter is generated using a merge data file and sent to the voter. The Call Center allows calls to be made to voters in an easy manner. When the Call Center screen appears, it displays the voter's name, the challenge reason, and the voter's information, including phone numbers. Once contact is made with the voter, remarks or notes can be entered for future reference. After processing the call, the voter's record is saved and the next challenged voter's name and information will appear.

#### **Ballot Challenged for *No Signature***

If a vote by mail ballot has been challenged because the voter neglected to sign the return envelope, a letter and a copy of the voter's ballot envelope is generated using a merge data file (see Exhibit 1a and 1b). The letter instructs the voter to sign and return the copy of the ballot envelope before 8pm on election day in order for their ballot to be counted. A postage paid business reply envelope is also provided to the voter for returning this signed copy. When received in our office, the copy is matched to the original return envelope and the voter's signature is then verified against the voter's registration card on file in the usual manner and the ballot is released for counting.

It is too late to send letters the last seven days prior to election day to secure the voter's signature by return mail. During this period, the Call Center Processing module is utilized to contact the voter by phone. The names of voters with a challenged ballot will be displayed, one at a time, with the challenged reason and the voter's phone number. More than one staff member can be working in the Call Center Processing module at any one time. If the ballot has been challenged for a missing signature, the voter is contacted and given options for casting a ballot that can be counted: 1) they can come into our office and have a second ballot issued; or 2) they may go to their polling place on election day and vote by provisional ballot.

### **Ballot Challenged for *Signature Does Not Match***

If it is determined that the signature on the envelope does not match the signature on the voter's registration card, the ballot is given a specific challenge code and a letter is generated using merge codes (see Exhibit 2). The letter instructs the voter to call our office no later than 8pm on election day in order to have their ballot counted. When the voter calls in, they must supply their driver's license number or State I.D. number and their date of birth to verify that we are speaking to the correct voter. The voter is then asked if they voted the ballot and signed the envelope. If yes, the ballot is released for counting. The voter is also informed that because their signature has changed and to alleviate any questions in the future, a new voter registration card will be sent to them to complete and return, thus, updating their signature.

Again, the last seven days prior to election day, it is too late to send a letter. Utilizing the Call Center, the voter is contacted by phone to verify the questionable signature.

### **Last Several Days Prior to Election Day**

The last several days prior to election day, any voter who has been sent a letter and not responded, or has been left a phone message and not responded, is contacted again by phone. This continues through election day. Again, every effort is made to contact the voter so that their ballot may be counted.

### **Public Response**

The elections office has had a very positive response from the voting public by providing this service. Although sometimes the voter is embarrassed to learn that they have neglected to sign the return envelope or that their signature no longer matches their voter registration card, they are very pleasantly surprised that we take extra measures to make sure that their vote can be counted and eagerly express their gratitude. It has definitely been worth the effort.

### **Late Ballots**

To diminish the number of mail ballots which are received after election day and cannot be counted, our office coordinates with the local post offices to "cull" return ballot envelopes beginning the Saturday prior to election day. A letter from our office is sent to the Butte County Postmaster requesting they notify all their carriers and clerks to separate the return ballot envelopes and hold them to be picked up by a deputized elections official. This has significantly reduced the number of mail ballots received after election day. Although many of these "culled" ballots might reach our office by election day, this extra step guarantees the ballots will not be received too late to be counted.

### **Insufficient Postage on Vote by Mail Applications and Return Ballots**

Our office has set up a permit account with the local post office to fund election related mail that would normally be returned to the voter for insufficient postage. If a voter neglects to put postage on a mail ballot application or their return ballots or uses too little postage, the post office will deliver the mail piece to our office and deduct the postage amount due from this account.

See Exhibit 3 for various vote by mail statistics.

**CANDACE J. GRUBBS**  
**COUNTY CLERK-RECORDER/REGISTRAR OF VOTERS**  
**COUNTY OF BUTTE**

**Elections Division**

25 County Center Drive, Suite  
110  
Oroville, CA 95965-3361



530-538-7761  
800-894-7761  
Fax: 530-538-6853  
<http://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net>

**JANE A. DOE**  
**999 ELM PKWY**  
**OROVILLE CA 95966**

**022-9999-8888-1**

Dear Voter:

Our office has received your voted ballot for the November 2, 2010 Consolidated General Election, but you neglected to sign the ballot envelope. We cannot open and count your ballot without your signature. It must first be compared against the signature on your voter registration in order to be counted.

If you wish to have your ballot counted, you must sign the enclosed copy of the ballot envelope and return it in the envelope provided in one of the following methods:

**By Mail:**

- We strongly urge you mail it by October 26<sup>th</sup>. It must be received by the Butte County Elections Office no later than 8pm Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Postmarks do not count.

**In Person at the Butte County Elections Office, 25 County Center Drive, Suite 110, Oroville:**

- Monday – Friday from 8am to 5pm
- Tuesday November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7am to 8pm

**After Hours or Weekends:**

- Place the ballot envelope in the green drop box located at curb on south entrance to building.

**In Person at any Polling Place in the City of Chico:**

- Tuesday November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7am to 8pm.

**If you wish to vote at the polling place on Election Day:**

Take this letter with you to your polling place. Let the precinct officer know that you returned a ballot that cannot be counted. The precinct officer will guide you through the steps of voting by provisional ballot so that you may cast your vote.

If you have any questions, please contact the Butte County Elections Office at (530) 538-7761 or toll free within Butte County only at 1-800-894-7761.

Sincerely,  
Butte County Elections Office

**VOTED BALLOTS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN 8:00 P.M. ON ELECTION DAY**

**YOU MAY RETURN YOUR VOTED BALLOT...**

- BY MAIL - BEFORE ELECTION DAY (Postmarks are not acceptable.)
- IN PERSON - ON OR BEFORE ELECTION DAY

You may return your ballot to any polling place in Butte County on Election Day or to the Butte County Elections Office, 25 County Center Drive, Oroville, on or before Election Day.

**WARNING - VOTING TWICE IN THE SAME ELECTION IS A CRIME.**

If you have spoiled your ballot and wish another to be sent to you, call (530) 538-7761 or toll-free within Butte County at (800) 894-7761.

By law, the signature on this envelope will be matched and verified against the signature on the voter's registration card.

**VOTER: READ STATEMENT AND COMPLETE ITEMS 1-3 BELOW**

I am the person whose name appears on this envelope, I am a resident of the precinct in which I am voting, I reside at the address shown, and I have neither applied for, nor intend to apply for, a vote by mail ballot from any other jurisdiction for this election. I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

**COMPLETE THIS BOX IF BALLOT IS RETURNED BY AN AUTHORIZED PERSON**

I declare, under penalty of perjury, that due to illness or disability, I authorize the following person to return my ballot. Relationship (**YOU MUST CIRCLE ONE**): spouse, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, brother, sister or a person residing in voter's household.

\_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print name of designee returning ballot      Signature of designee returning ballot

**Voter must sign in his/her own handwriting for the ballot to be counted:**

① X \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature DO NOT PRINT (Power of Attorney Not Acceptable)      Date

③ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Voter's Residence Address and City (No PO Boxes or mailing addresses)

Witness Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
 If voter is unable to sign due to illness or injury, voter may make a mark witnessed by one person.

1802      DEM      001      022-9999-8888-1

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**JANE A. DOE**  
**999 ELM PKWY**  
**OROVILLE CA 95966**

**022-9999-8888-1**

Dear Voter:

Our office has received your voted ballot for the November 2, 2010 Consolidated General Election. We have compared your signature on the ballot envelope against the signature on your voter registration and found it does not match.

In order for your ballot to be counted, we must first verify that it was you who voted the ballot and signed the ballot envelope.

Please contact the Butte County Elections Office immediately at (530) 538-7761 or toll free within Butte County only at 1-800-894-7761. You must contact us no later than 8pm Tuesday November 2<sup>nd</sup> in order for your ballot to be counted. If you do not call our office, your ballot cannot be opened and counted.

Sincerely,  
Butte County Elections Office

# VBM Statistics

<b>VOTE BY MAIL CALL CENTER RESULTS: "No Signature" or "Signature Does Not Match"</b>	
<b>November 2, 2010 Consolidated General Election</b>	
<b>Cumulative letters sent</b>	<b>671</b>
<b>Cumulative challenged ballots corrected</b>	<b>525</b>
<b>Voter Registration Cards sent to update signature</b>	<b>320</b>

<b>VOTE BY MAIL BALLOTS "CULLED" FROM POST OFFICE</b>				
<b>Election Date</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
11-2002	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
3-2-2004	282	387	220	889
11-2-2004	350	423	207	980
11-8-2005	491	768	316	1,575
6-6-2006	931	617	226	1,774
11-7-2006	540	631	257	1,428
2-5-2008	1,159	649	472	2,280
6-3-2008	918	725	448	2,091
11-4-2008	757	738	492	1,987
6-8-2010	1,048	972	476	2,496
11-2-2010	872	863	407	2,142

<b>VOTE BY MAIL BALLOTS RETURNED &amp; LATE RETURN STATS</b>		
<b>Election Date</b>	<b>Total Ballots Returned</b>	<b># Ballots Returned Too Late &amp; Percentage</b>
3-7-2000	20,303	457 = .020%
11-7-2000	28,069	188 = .006%
3-5-2002	16,067	164 = .010%
11-5-2002	20,980	114 = .005%
3-2-2004	26,562	130 = .004%
11-2-2004	45,078	114 = .002%
6-6-2006	29,150	219 = .007%
11-7-2006	39,613	135 = .003%
2-5-2008	40,047	389 = .009%
6-3-2008	31,420	165 = .005%
11-4-2008	54,248	132 = .002%
6-8-2010	35,079	137 = .003%
11-2-2010	49,091	131 = .002%