

CHAPTER 2017-45

Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 105

An act relating to the canvassing of vote-by-mail ballots; amending s. 101.68, F.S.; deleting an obsolete date; modifying and clarifying provisions governing the canvassing of vote-by-mail ballots; authorizing use of the vote-by-mail ballot cure affidavit if an elector's signature does not match the signature in the registration books or precinct register; requiring the supervisor of elections to immediately notify an elector upon receipt of a vote-by-mail ballot with a missing or mismatched signature; revising terminology; revising the cure affidavit instructions with respect to acceptable forms of identification; specifying that a Florida driver license or Florida identification card are acceptable forms of identification for purposes of curing a vote-by-mail ballot; expanding the scope of post-election signature update requests to include electors who cured a vote-by-mail ballot with a mismatched signature; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 101.68, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

101.68 Canvassing of vote-by-mail ballot.—

(1) The supervisor of the county where the absent elector resides shall receive the voted ballot, at which time the supervisor shall compare the signature of the elector on the voter's certificate with the signature of the elector in the registration books or the precinct register to determine whether the elector is duly registered in the county and may record on the elector's registration certificate that the elector has voted. ~~However, effective July 1, 2005,~~ An elector who dies after casting a vote-by-mail ballot but on or before election day shall remain listed in the registration books until the results have been certified for the election in which the ballot was cast. The supervisor shall safely keep the ballot unopened in his or her office until the county canvassing board canvasses the vote. Except as provided in subsection (4), after a vote-by-mail ballot is received by the supervisor, the ballot is deemed to have been cast, and changes or additions may not be made to the voter's certificate.

(2)(a) The county canvassing board may begin the canvassing of vote-by-mail ballots at 7 a.m. on the 15th day before the election, but not later than noon on the day following the election. In addition, for any county using electronic tabulating equipment, the processing of vote-by-mail ballots through such tabulating equipment may begin at 7 a.m. on the 15th day before the election. However, notwithstanding any such authorization to begin canvassing or otherwise processing vote-by-mail ballots early, no result shall be released until after the closing of the polls in that county on election day. Any supervisor of elections, deputy supervisor of elections, canvassing board member, election board member, or election employee who

releases the results of a canvassing or processing of vote-by-mail ballots prior to the closing of the polls in that county on election day commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

(b) To ensure that all vote-by-mail ballots to be counted by the canvassing board are accounted for, the canvassing board shall compare the number of ballots in its possession with the number of requests for ballots received to be counted according to the supervisor's file or list.

(c)1. The canvassing board must shall, if the supervisor has not already done so, compare the signature of the elector on the voter's certificate or on the vote-by-mail ballot cure affidavit as provided in subsection (4) with the signature of the elector in the registration books or the precinct register to see that the elector is duly registered in the county and to determine the legality of that vote-by-mail ballot. A vote-by-mail ballot may only be counted if:

a. The signature on the voter's certificate or the cure affidavit matches the elector's signature in the registration books or precinct register; however, in the case of a cure affidavit, the supporting identification listed in subsection (4) must also confirm the identity of the elector; or

b. The cure affidavit contains a signature that does not match the elector's signature in the registration books or precinct register, but the elector has submitted a current and valid Tier 1 identification pursuant to subsection (4) which confirms the identity of the elector.

2. The ballot of an elector who casts a vote-by-mail ballot shall be counted even if the elector dies on or before election day, as long as, before ~~prior to~~ the death of the voter, the ballot was postmarked by the United States Postal Service, date-stamped with a verifiable tracking number by a common carrier, or already in the possession of the supervisor of elections. A vote-by-mail ballot is considered illegal if the voter's certificate or vote-by-mail ballot affidavit does not include the signature of the elector, as shown by the registration records or the precinct register. However,

3. A vote-by-mail ballot is not considered illegal if the signature of the elector does not cross the seal of the mailing envelope. ~~If the canvassing board determines that any ballot is illegal, a member of the board shall, without opening the envelope, mark across the face of the envelope: "rejected as illegal." The vote-by-mail ballot affidavit, if applicable, the envelope, and the ballot contained therein shall be preserved in the manner that official ballots voted are preserved.~~

4.2. If any elector or candidate present believes that a vote-by-mail ballot is illegal due to a defect apparent on the voter's certificate or the cure ~~vote-by-mail ballot~~ affidavit, he or she may, at any time before the ballot is removed from the envelope, file with the canvassing board a protest against the canvass of that ballot, specifying the precinct, the ballot, and the reason

he or she believes the ballot to be illegal. A challenge based upon a defect in the voter's certificate or ~~cure vote-by-mail ballot~~ affidavit may not be accepted after the ballot has been removed from the mailing envelope.

5. If the canvassing board determines that a ballot is illegal, a member of the board must, without opening the envelope, mark across the face of the envelope: "rejected as illegal." The cure affidavit, if applicable, the envelope, and the ballot therein shall be preserved in the manner that official ballots are preserved.

(d) The canvassing board shall record the ballot upon the proper record, unless the ballot has been previously recorded by the supervisor. The mailing envelopes shall be opened and the secrecy envelopes shall be mixed so as to make it impossible to determine which secrecy envelope came out of which signed mailing envelope; however, in any county in which an electronic or electromechanical voting system is used, the ballots may be sorted by ballot styles and the mailing envelopes may be opened and the secrecy envelopes mixed separately for each ballot style. The votes on vote-by-mail ballots shall be included in the total vote of the county.

(3) The supervisor or the chair of the county canvassing board shall, after the board convenes, have custody of the vote-by-mail ballots until a final proclamation is made as to the total vote received by each candidate.

~~(4)(a) The supervisor of elections shall, on behalf of the county canvassing board, notify each elector whose ballot was rejected as illegal and provide the specific reason the ballot was rejected. The supervisor shall mail a voter registration application to the elector to be completed indicating the elector's current signature if the elector's ballot was rejected due to a difference between the elector's signature on the voter's certificate or vote-by-mail ballot affidavit and the elector's signature in the registration books or precinct register. This section does not prohibit the supervisor from providing additional methods for updating an elector's signature.~~

~~(b) Until 5 p.m. on the day before an election, The supervisor shall, on behalf of the county canvassing board, immediately notify allow an elector who has returned a vote-by-mail ballot that does not include the elector's signature or contains a signature that does not match the elector's signature in the registration books or precinct register. The supervisor shall allow such an elector to complete and submit an affidavit in order to cure the unsigned vote-by-mail ballot until 5 p.m. on the day before the election.~~

~~(b)(c) The elector shall provide identification to the supervisor and must complete a cure vote-by-mail ballot affidavit in substantially the following form:~~

VOTE-BY-MAIL BALLOT CURE AFFIDAVIT

I,, am a qualified voter in this election and registered voter of County, Florida. I do solemnly swear or affirm that I requested and returned

the vote-by-mail ballot and that I have not and will not vote more than one ballot in this election. I understand that if I commit or attempt any fraud in connection with voting, vote a fraudulent ballot, or vote more than once in an election, I may be convicted of a felony of the third degree and fined up to \$5,000 and imprisoned for up to 5 years. I understand that my failure to sign this affidavit means that my vote-by-mail ballot will be invalidated.

...(Voter's Signature)...

...(Address)...

~~(c)(d)~~ Instructions must accompany the cure ~~vote-by-mail ballot~~ affidavit in substantially the following form:

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THE AFFIDAVIT. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS MAY CAUSE YOUR BALLOT NOT TO COUNT.

1. In order to ensure that your vote-by-mail ballot will be counted, your affidavit should be completed and returned as soon as possible so that it can reach the supervisor of elections of the county in which your precinct is located no later than 5 p.m. on the ~~2nd~~ day before the election.

2. You must sign your name on the line above (Voter's Signature).

3. You must make a copy of one of the following forms of identification:

a. Tier 1 identification.—Current and valid identification that includes your name and photograph: Florida driver license; Florida identification card issued by the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; United States passport; debit or credit card; military identification; student identification; retirement center identification; neighborhood association identification; public assistance identification; veteran health identification card issued by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; a Florida license to carry a concealed weapon or firearm; or an employee identification card issued by any branch, department, agency, or entity of the Federal Government, the state, a county, or a municipality; or

b. Tier 2 identification.—ONLY IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A TIER 1 FORM OF IDENTIFICATION, identification that shows your name and current residence address: current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or government document (excluding voter identification card).

4. Place the envelope bearing the affidavit into a mailing envelope addressed to the supervisor. Insert a copy of your identification in the mailing envelope. Mail, deliver, or have delivered the completed affidavit along with the copy of your identification to your county supervisor of

elections. Be sure there is sufficient postage if mailed and that the supervisor's address is correct.

5. Alternatively, you may fax or e-mail your completed affidavit and a copy of your identification to the supervisor of elections. If e-mailing, please provide these documents as attachments.

(d)(e) The department and each supervisor shall include the affidavit and instructions on their respective websites. The supervisor must include his or her office's mailing address, e-mail address, and fax number on the page containing the affidavit instructions; the department's instruction page must include the office mailing addresses, e-mail addresses, and fax numbers of all supervisors of elections or provide a conspicuous link to such addresses.

(e)(f) The supervisor shall attach each affidavit received to the appropriate vote-by-mail ballot mailing envelope.

(f) After all election results on the ballot have been certified, the supervisor shall, on behalf of the county canvassing board, notify each elector whose ballot has been rejected as illegal and provide the specific reason the ballot was rejected. In addition, the supervisor shall mail a voter registration application to the elector to be completed indicating the elector's current signature if the signature on the voter's certificate or cure affidavit did not match the elector's signature in the registration books or precinct register. This section does not prohibit the supervisor from providing additional methods for updating an elector's signature.

Section 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

Approved by the Governor June 2, 2017.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 2, 2017.