

Submitted electronically

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RE: Response to NC Republican Party's Request for Declaratory Ruling

We are writing to you today to voice our opposition to a recent request by the NC Republican Party for a declaratory ruling. The NC GOP has requested permission for county boards of elections to verify voter signatures on absentee ballots and absentee ballot request forms. If granted, this change could potentially disenfranchise thousands of North Carolinians – which is why we adamantly oppose this proposed request.

Democracy North Carolina opposes this request for the following reasons:

Signature verification will result in ballots being rejected without reason. Signatures can change due to aging, disability, and legal name changes. Numerous court cases – including [Saucedo v. Gardener](#) in New Hampshire and [La Follette v. Padilla](#) in California – demonstrate how signature verification has been used to throw ballots away, with voters left unaware that their ballot was not counted.

Signature verification has been shown to disproportionately impact Black and brown voters. Research has shown that Black¹ and brown² voters are already more likely to have their mail ballots rejected than their white peers. A recent election in Washington state showed that mail ballots cast by Black voters were more than four times as likely to be rejected due to signature verification.³

Signature verification is unnecessary. North Carolina law currently requires voters to verify their identification via personal information on their absentee ballot request form – including their driver's license number or the last 4 digits of their Social Security Number. In addition, voters must affirm their identity by having two witnesses or one notary sign their absentee ballot.

¹ STANFORD-MIT HEALTHY ELECTIONS PROJECT, Wisconsin Election Analysis, August 6, 2020. [https://healthyelections.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Wisconsin%20Election%20Analysis%20Version%202\(1\).pdf](https://healthyelections.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Wisconsin%20Election%20Analysis%20Version%202(1).pdf)

² Brennan Center for Justice, Digging into the Georgia Primary Election, Sept. 10, 2020. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/digging-georgia-primary>

³ New York Times, Rejected Mail Ballots Are Showing Racial Disparities, Feb. 2, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/us/mail-voting-black-latino.html>

Adding an additional layer of security is a veiled attempt to block access to the ballot, under the guise of election security.

Allowing counties to have different signature verification systems would result in different voting experiences. The request states that prior to 2020, it was “common practice for county boards of elections to compare signatures on container-return envelopes to the voter’s signature on their registration file.” However, there are no policies or procedures providing objective standards for the signature matching process. This will result in at best uneven and at worst wildly different acceptance rates based on the county where the voter resides.

The training and funding to verify signatures would be financially and administratively burdensome. County election staff are not experts in handwriting analysis, and should not be expected to do this task without proper training or funding. States with signature verification in place spend a significant amount of money on training and software systems, placing additional financial burdens on already under-resourced counties.

The State Board of Elections is tasked with overseeing fair, safe, and just elections in our state. In 2020, one in five voters chose to cast their ballot by mail. Voters who choose this voting option must be given the opportunity to have their ballot counted fairly and uniformly, no matter where they reside within the state.

We ask you to protect mail voters by rejecting this request.

Sincerely,

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