



CHAPTER 13: PETITIONS¹

Section 13.01 Petitions Introduction

Chapter 13 covers the rules for handling petitions for candidates, local and statewide issues, and referenda. The board must review candidate, issue, and referendum petitions to ensure they're valid and have enough signatures. This chapter outlines the basic requirements, candidate petitions, prechecks, circulator requirements, signature verification, how to handle invalid signatures, and rules on where to file. Additionally, it includes different types of state-level petitions, how to examine them, check signatures, and process results.

Section 13.02 Petitions Generally

PETITION BASICS

The board must check all candidate petitions, most types of issue petitions, and referendum petitions for validity and sufficiency.² The Secretary of State provides many petition forms. Board employees can find these forms on the [Secretary of State's website](#).

Always give candidates or issue groups the most current form.³ The Secretary of State updates forms when laws change. It's important to pull petitions directly from the Secretary of State's website each time. If a board employee gives an old form by mistake, the board cannot reject the petition for using that form as long as it meets all other rules.⁴

The board must check every signature on valid part-petitions. Do this even if a candidate or issue already has enough signatures to be on the ballot.

¹[Directive 2026-40](#).

²[R.C. 3501.11\(K\)\(1\)](#).

³[R.C. 3501.38\(L\)](#).

⁴[R.C. 3501.38\(L\)](#).

Ohio law requires “substantial compliance” with petition rules.⁵ This means:

If board employees find minor errors, the petition may still be valid, and the board will determine if the candidate substantially complied with the form.

For statewide candidates, the Secretary of State decides if it’s acceptable.

Decisions depend on each case and consider the facts. The board should talk with its legal counsel, the county prosecutor, when reviewing petitions.

Also, look at municipal charters for any special rules for candidates seeking a city or village office.

CANDIDATE AND LOCAL ISSUE PETITION PRECHECKS

Do not precheck any petition before the original petition has been officially filed with the accompanying filing fee.⁶

Why board employees shouldn’t precheck:

It gives a false sense of security for candidates and issue groups.

Ohio law says candidates are responsible for ensuring their own petition satisfies the requirements of law.

Candidates and issue groups must investigate, learn, and know election laws.

If the board finds it is not valid after it has been filed, it will still have to reject it.

The board could be accused of favoritism or misconduct.

Do Not Precheck Petitions

It is unwise for a board of elections to give a candidate or petitioner the impression that their petition is valid and sufficient before it is officially filed. If the board later determines that the petition is invalid, it must reject it, regardless of whether its staff previously prechecked the same petition. This practice of prechecking petitions has led to some boards of elections facing accusations of incompetence, political favoritism, and misconduct.

⁵[R.C.3513.07; 3513.261](#).

⁶[State ex rel. Chevalier v. Brown](#), 17 Ohio St.3d 61, 63 (1985); [State ex rel. Sturgill v. Lorain Cty. Bd. of Elections](#), 164 Ohio App.3d 272 (2005); [State ex rel. Donegan v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. of Elections](#), 136 Ohio App.3d 589, 595 (2000).

Section 13.03 Types of Petitions

CANDIDATE PETITIONS

These resources from the Secretary of State can help prospective candidates and issue petitioners:

[Ohio Candidate Requirement Guide](#)

[Ohio Presidential Guide](#)

[Campaign Finance Handbook](#)

Boards can help by providing free copies of these guides. Board employees can also explain the filing process and tell them what happens after the filing deadline. Some boards also provide public access computers for candidates to check their own petitions.

LOCAL QUESTION AND ISSUE PETITIONS

The board must:

- Review, examine, and certify the sufficiency and validity of local question and issue petitions.

- Make sure they are valid.

- Verify they have enough signatures.

Sometimes another office must approve the petition before it comes to the board. Check municipal charters for special rules.

These resources can help with questions on ballot questions and issues:

[The Ohio Ballot Questions & Issues Handbook: A Guide for Boards of Elections, Taxing Authorities and Political Subdivisions to Placing Questions and Issues on the Ballot](#)

[Guide to Local Liquor Options Elections](#)

Additional checklists for local issues are included at the end of [Chapter 5, Ballots](#).

INITIATIVE

An initiative lets voters propose and vote on new laws or changes to the Ohio Constitution. There are three types:

Citizen-initiated statute:⁷ Voters suggest a new law by filing a petition.

Citizen-initiated constitutional amendment:⁸ Voters suggest a change to the Ohio Constitution by filing a petition.

General Assembly-initiated constitutional amendment:⁹ The Legislature suggests a change to the Ohio Constitution. No petition is needed since it comes from lawmakers.

REFERENDUM

A referendum lets voters say “yes” or “no” to a new law. It starts when voters file a petition after the Ohio General Assembly passes a bill and the governor signs it.¹⁰

Section 13.04 Filing Petitions

WHERE TO FILE DECLARATIONS OF CANDIDACY, NOMINATING PETITIONS, AND QUESTION OR ISSUE PETITIONS¹¹

The rules for where to file depend on the office or issue.

File with the Secretary of State’s office:

Offices or issues submitted to electors throughout the state, including petitions for joint candidates for governor and lieutenant governor.

File with the county board of elections:

Offices or issues just for your county.

Offices or issues for areas smaller than your county.

For districts that cross county lines, file with the board in the most populous county

⁷[Article II, Section 1b of the Ohio Constitution.](#)

⁸[Article II, Section 1a of the Ohio Constitution.](#)

⁹[Article XVI, Section 1 of the Ohio Constitution.](#)

¹⁰[Article II, Section 1c of the Ohio Constitution.](#)

¹¹[R.C. 3513.05; R.C. 3513.261.](#)

To find the most populous county for Congress, State Senate, State Representative, State Board of Education, and Court of Appeals districts, look at the list at the end of the [Candidate Requirement Guide](#).

For Educational Service Center (ESC) districts that cross county lines, file in the county where the ESC's office is located.¹²

UNFAIR POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES NOTICE

When someone files a petition, the board must:

- ☐ Give them a copy of [R.C. 3517.21](#) (Infiltration of Campaign - False Statements in Campaign Materials - Election of Candidate).
- ☐ Have them sign that they received it.¹³

Section 13.05 Filing a Candidate Petition

If a board employee, in their official capacity, is approached by a person who is considering running for office in Ohio, the Secretary of State's [Candidate Requirement Guide](#) can help the potential candidate navigate the legal requirements to get their name on the ballot. This guide is only a brief summary and not a complete digest of laws.

The guide contains information on the terms of office and the conditions candidates must meet: residency requirements, minimum or maximum ages, or other qualifications or legal requirements. Each office has different petition filing requirements, deadlines, forms, filing fees, and locations, and the number of signatures needed. The board provides candidates with at least one copy of a candidate petition form upon request. Candidates may make additional copies of the form as provided by the county board of elections.

Once the candidate has completed filling out and signing the petition, this signed part-petition may be copied prior to obtaining any elector signatures on the part-petitions.

¹²[R.C. 3513.255](#).

¹³[R.C. 3513.33](#). Please note the decision in [Susan B. Anthony List v. Ohio Elections Commission](#), 45 F. Supp.3d 765 (S.D. Ohio, 2014).

However, this original signed part-petition must be filed with the other part-petitions at the office of the appropriate filing entity.¹⁴

CANDIDATE PETITION FORM REQUIREMENTS

Candidate Name

There are special rules for name changes:

If a candidate changed their name in the past five years, they must list both names on the declaration of candidacy and petition.¹⁵

Name changes due to marriage don't count in this rule.¹⁶

Office

The petition must clearly show which office the candidate wants. This helps:

Electors know what they're signing for.

The board knows which office to list on the ballot.

Candidates should include the office precinct or ward if needed.

Term

For unexpired terms, the candidate must list when the term ends.¹⁷

Date of the Election

The petition must show which election they want to be on the ballot. This helps those signing the petition understand which election is at issue.¹⁸

Candidate Signature¹⁹

A candidate must sign the declaration or statement of candidacy.²⁰

¹⁴[R.C. 3513.09](#); [R.C. 3513.261](#).

¹⁵[R.C. 3513.06](#). *State ex rel. Morrison v. Franklin County Board of Elections*, 63 Ohio St. 2d 336 (1980); *Pierce v. Brushart*, 153 Ohio St. 372 (1950); *Martinez v. Cuyahoga Cty. Board of Elections*, 2006-Ohio-16652; *McLaughlin v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 156 Ohio App.3d 98 (2004).

¹⁶[R.C. 3513.06](#).

¹⁷[R.C. 3513.07](#); [R.C. 3513.08](#); [R.C. 3513.28](#).

¹⁸*Hill v. Cuyahoga County Bd. of Elections*, 68 Ohio St.2d 39 (1981); *State ex rel. Stewart v. Clinton Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 124 Ohio St.3d 584 (2010).

¹⁹[R.C. 3513.09](#).

²⁰Generally, signing or affixing a signature to an election-related document requires a person's written, cursive-style legal mark written in that person's own hand. However, voters with a disability may personally affix their signature through the use of a reasonable accommodation, including the use of assistive technology or an augmentative device such as a signature stamp. See [R.C. 3501.011](#), [R.C. 3501.382\(F\)](#) and related [OAG 2015-012](#).

The candidate only needs to sign one part-petition paper. This signed page must be copied on each separate petition paper before electors sign them.

The board must decide if the prospective candidate signed the statement of candidacy before the petition was circulated.

Nominating Petition Portion

If the “Nominating Petition” part of the form is not complete, the board should talk with legal counsel and decide if it meets substantial compliance.

Checking Part-Petitions

Before looking at individual signatures, board employees must:

1. Check the circulator’s statement on the last page.
2. Make sure it is properly completed.

If not, the entire part-petition is invalid.

Fulfilling Public Records Requests

Boards may receive public records requests for copies of the part-petitions for a particular candidate or issue. All part-petitions are public records and must be disclosed according to [R.C. 149.43](#).²¹ When someone requests part-petitions, the board must allow them to inspect or copy the petitions. This is true whether or not the board has marked the petitions or finished checking the signatures.²²

Talk to legal counsel (the county prosecuting attorney) before rejecting, fulfilling, or responding to the request.

NOTE: See **Section 13.09** regarding overcounting and undercounting signatures.

Section 13.06 Filing a Local Question or Issue

The [Ohio Ballot Questions and Issues Handbook](#) and the [Guide to Local Liquor Options Elections](#) are guides for boards, taxing authorities, and political subdivisions that are placing questions or issues on the ballot or are voting on liquor options. See also the checklists at the end of [Chapter 5, Ballots](#).

²¹[R.C. 3513.05](#); [R.C. 3513.262](#); [R.C. 3513.263](#).

²²[R.C. 3513.05](#); [R.C. 3513.262](#); [R.C. 3513.263](#).

Under Ohio law, the board must approve ballot language for local questions and submit it to the Secretary of State's office for review. In some cases, local charters may allow a city, village, or county to dictate its own ballot language. Many boards have policies that delegate the task of preparing and submitting ballot language to staff, facilitating the resolution of any issues before the election.

Local ballot questions may include bond issues, tax levies, income taxes, charter amendments, initiatives, referendums, and zoning plans. Resolutions and petitions filed with the board help clarify the purpose, election date, millage amount, and duration of the levy. Board personnel should ensure that the proposed ballot format meets statutory and board requirements before submission to the Secretary of State's office.

The administrative review process checks that the ballot language matches the information in accompanying documents like resolutions or ordinances. For example, if a resolution states a proposed tax levy of five mills, the ballot must reflect that amount. After the review, the Secretary of State's Elections Division will email the board of elections with the reviewed ballot language. The reviewer may initial the document to indicate approval or include corrections and comments about the ballot language and accompanying documents.

Additional checklists to help the board review questions and issues are included at the end of this chapter.

Section 13.07 How to Submit a Referendum or Initiative Petition

An **initiative** is the process by which a proposed new statute or constitutional amendment is presented to the voters of Ohio for their approval. The Ohio Constitution allows for both initiated statutes and initiated constitutional amendments.

A **referendum** is a process to stay a law recently enacted by the General Assembly until the law itself can be submitted to the voters for approval or rejection at a general election. This process begins when a petition is filed by a group of Ohio electors. The petitions must be filed with the Secretary of State within 90 days after the law or section of law to be referred has been filed with the Secretary of State's office by the governor.

A **Citizen-Initiated Statute** occurs when a citizen believes that an issue is not properly addressed (or addressed at all) in the Ohio Revised Code. They can follow the

procedures outlined in the Ohio Constitution and Revised Code to submit a proposed law (statute) to the people of Ohio for a statewide vote. This process starts when a petition is filed by a group of Ohio electors.

Citizen-Initiated Constitutional Amendments are similar; they occur when a citizen believes that an issue is not properly addressed or not addressed at all in the Ohio Constitution. They can follow the procedures outlined in the Ohio Constitution and Revised Code to submit a proposed constitutional amendment to the people of Ohio for a statewide vote. This process also begins when a petition is filed by a group of Ohio electors.

A **General Assembly-Initiated Constitutional Amendment** requires the legislature to pass a joint resolution to present a proposed constitutional amendment to voters. This type of amendment does not require a petition, as it is not driven by citizen initiative.²³

For referenda or initiatives that require petitions, the voters leading the effort form a committee of three to five members who share their vision. Together, the committee needs to file an initial petition. If the petition is for an initiated statute or constitutional amendment, it is filed with the Ohio Attorney General. If it is for a referendum, it is filed with the Secretary of State.

The filing must include the title, full text, and a brief summary of the proposed law or constitutional amendment. Once the language is approved, the committee can begin the process of gathering signatures. The number of signatures the committee needs to collect is based on the type of petition and the total votes cast in the last gubernatorial election.

- For initiated statutes, at least three percent of the total votes cast in the last gubernatorial election.
- For referenda, at least six percent of the total votes cast in the last gubernatorial election.
- For constitutional amendments, at least 10 percent of the total votes cast in the last gubernatorial election.

²³See also <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/duties-and-responsibilities/putting-an-issue-on-the-ballot>.

The committee also needs to ensure that they have collected sufficient signatures to demonstrate support from residents in at least half of Ohio's counties. See the Secretary of State's website [Putting an Issue on the Ballot](#) for more information.

After collecting enough signatures, the committee can submit the completed petitions for certification. To submit an issue for certification, the committee must:

- ☐ Mark each part-petition with the county name where it was gathered.
- ☐ Number each part-petition in order within that county.
- ☐ Sort part-petitions by county before filing with the Secretary of State's office.²⁴
- ☐ Provide contact information (name, address, phone number, and email) for the committee chairperson and a representative.
- ☐ File an electronic copy of all part-petitions included in the petition filing (scanned part-petitions that contain one folder for each county containing individually scanned part-petitions in sequential order).
- ☐ Include a summary or manifest containing the number of part-petitions and signatures per county, in a spreadsheet and PDF. Columns should be formatted as follows:
 - Column A – County name.
 - Column B – Total number of part-petitions for that county.
 - Column C – Total number of signatures on the part-petitions listed in Column C.

Column B and C must be totaled at the top of the sheet.

- ☐ File an index of the electronic copy of the petition – by file name, includes county name and sequential number, **OR** a sortable document that includes the petition number, county, signatures, and file name.²⁵
- ☐ Include a count of part-petitions filed per county and the number of signatures on each.²⁶
- ☐ Submit a blank, electronic copy of a part-petition in PDF format.²⁷

²⁴[R.C. 3519.16\(B\)](#).

²⁵[R.C. 3519.16\(B\)](#)

²⁶[R.C. 3519.16\(B\)](#).

²⁷[R.C. 3519.16\(B\)\(1\)](#).

- ☐ Pay a fee of \$25.²⁸

²⁸[R.C. 3513.10\(B\)\(2\)\(a\).](#)

Section 13.08 Petition Circulators

QUALIFICATIONS OF CIRCULATORS

- ☐ Circulators must be at least 18 years old.²⁹
- ☐ Circulators don't need to be an Ohio elector or resident.³⁰
- ☐ Circulators of candidate petitions must belong to the same political party named in the declaration of candidacy.
- ☐ Some convicted felons cannot circulate petitions (see additional information below).³¹
- ☐ State law doesn't require circulators to provide identifying information that would help the board verify if they're disqualified.
- ☐ The board should assume circulators are qualified unless it has clear proof they aren't.

PARTY AFFILIATION OF CIRCULATORS

The board will determine a circulator's party affiliation as follows:

Not an Ohio Elector

If the circulator is not an Ohio elector, accept their claim of party membership in the circulator's statement as true, unless the board has information proving otherwise.

Ohio Elector

An Ohio elector circulating someone else's partisan primary candidacy petition must not have voted in any other party's primary election in the past two calendar years.³² The board should check the circulator's Ohio voting history using the statewide voter registration database. If the circulator voted in another party's primary during the previous two calendar years, the part-petition is invalid.

CANDIDATE AS CIRCULATOR

Candidates may circulate their own part-petition regardless of how they voted in the past two years.³³ If the candidate does not hold elected office or holds an office not

²⁹[R.C. 3503.06\(C\).](#)

³⁰[Citizens in Charge, Inc. v. Husted, S.D. Ohio No. 2:13-cv-935, 2015 U.S. Dist. \(Mar. 16, 2015\).](#)

³¹[Ohio Attorney General Advisory Opinion 2010-002.](#)

³²[R.C. 3513.05, 17.](#)

³³[R.C. 3513.191.](#)

nominated in a party primary, they don't need to file any additional forms. If the candidate holds a partisan public office, they can still run for office for a different party if they file [Form 10-Y](#) Declaration of Intent to Change Political Party Affiliation.

CONVICTED FELONS

Some convicted felons cannot circulate petitions.³⁴ However, state law doesn't require circulators to provide identifying information (such as date of birth, Social Security number, driver license number, etc.) that would help confirm whether a circulator is the same person listed in a voter registration database as disqualified due to a felony conviction.

So, when board employees are checking petitions, assume circulators are qualified unless there is "satisfactory evidence" that they aren't.

WHAT MUST BE IN THE CIRCULATOR'S STATEMENTS³⁵

Each part-petition must have a circulator's statement (called the *Statement of Solicitor*) with:

Circulator's signature.³⁶

How many signatures they witnessed.

For statewide petitions, also include:

Circulator's name.

Circulator's address.³⁷

- The name and address of the person who paid them to circulate the petition (if anyone).

³⁴[OAG 2010-002](#).

³⁵[R.C. 3501.38\(E\)\(1\)](#), [R.C. 3519.05](#).

³⁶Generally, signing or affixing a signature to an election-related document requires a person's written, cursive-style legal mark written in that person's own hand. However, voters with a disability may personally affix their signatures through the use of a reasonable accommodation, including the use of assistive technology or an augmentative device such as a signature stamp. See [R.C. 3501.011](#), [R.C. 3501.382\(F\)](#) and related [OAG 2015-012](#).

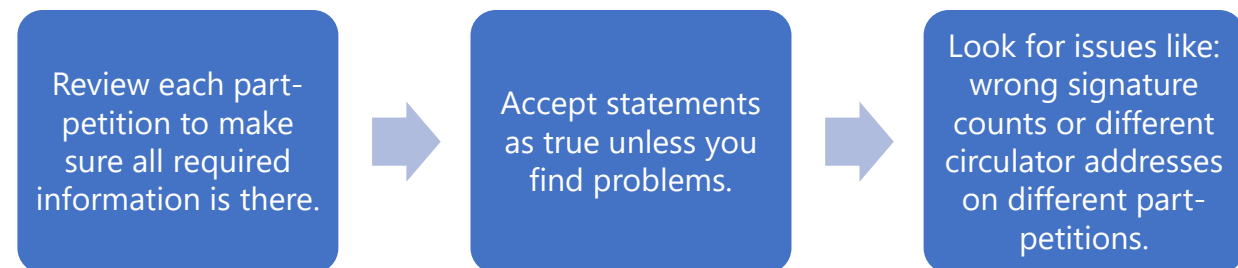
³⁷State law does not define "permanent residence address" for purposes of circulating issue petitions. A board of elections should presume that the address provided by the circulator is the circulator's permanent residence as the statement is signed under penalty of election falsification, which is a fifth degree felony. To the extent that an entity other than the Board believes that the circulator's written permanent residence address is not accurate, an informal objection or formal protest is not properly before a board of elections and should be filed with the Ohio Supreme Court.

Note: If the circulator is a qualified Ohio elector, their address on the statement doesn't have to match the address on file with the board. Do not reject a part-petition just because the consistently used address of the circulator doesn't match the board records.

Check each part-petition to make sure the circulator's statement is complete. Trust the circulator's statement unless the board finds problems in the number of signatures or in the circulator's info across part-petitions. An example might be if the circulator writes a different address on different part-petitions.

Section 13.09 How to Check and Verify Petitions

HOW TO CHECK CIRCULATOR STATEMENTS



When Signature Counts Are Too Low

If the circulator reports FEWER signatures than the total number of uncrossed-out signatures on the part-petition, don't automatically reject the petition. Sometimes circulators report fewer signatures than are actually on the petition (example: they write "20 signatures" but there are 22 signatures on the part-petition).

What to do:³⁸

Don't be too strict or technical.

Don't reject a part-petition *just* because the count is lower than the actual number.³⁹

Only reject it if there are signs of fraud or material misrepresentation.⁴⁰

³⁸*State ex rel. Schwarz v. Hamilton Cty. Bd. of Elections* (1962), 173 Ohio St. 321; *State ex rel. Curtis v. Summit Cty. Bd. of Elections* (2015), 144 Ohio St.3d 405.

³⁹See *State ex rel. Ferrara v. Trumbull Cty. Bd. Of Elections*, 166 Ohio St. 3d 64 (2021).

⁴⁰See *Ohio Mfrs.' Assn. v. Ohioans for Drug Price Relief Act* (2016), 147 Ohio St.3d 42, ¶19.

Circulators must state, under penalty of election falsification, how many signatures they witnessed affixed to the part-petition.⁴¹ The board can reject a part-petition if it has proof of fraud.⁴²

The law requires the board to:⁴³

- Investigate any irregularities and gather evidence.

- Issue subpoenas if needed.

- Report problems to the prosecutor or Secretary of State.⁴⁴

If the board has proof of fraud, document it and [report](#) the incident to the Public Integrity Division of the Secretary of State. .

When Signature Counts Are Too High

If a circulator claims **MORE** signatures than are actually on the part-petition (for example, they write “28 signatures” but there are only five signatures on the part-petition), the board must reject the entire part-petition when:

- It seems like a pattern of fraud.

- The problem happens across many part-petitions filed by one or more circulators for the same petition.⁴⁵

Exception:

- It’s minor counting mistakes.⁴⁶

- There is no sign of fraud.⁴⁷

In these cases, check each signature as usual.⁴⁸

⁴¹[R.C. 3501.38\(E\)\(1\)](#).

⁴²“And nothing in [Ferrara] disturbs the litany of caselaw providing that evidence of fraud triggers full invalidation of a part-petition.” *Ferrara* at ¶22.

⁴³[R.C. 3501.11\(J\)](#).

⁴⁴[R.C. 3501.11\(J\)](#).

⁴⁵“Systemic overcounts . . . are an open invitation to fraud . . . and . . . a part-petition of this type is invalid because, on its face, the attestation of the circulator is false: they did not witness the number of signatures indicated.” *Ohio Mfrs. Assn. v. Ohioans for Drug Price Relief Act*, 149 Ohio St.3d 250, at ¶44.

⁴⁶[Ohio Mfrs. Assn. v. Ohioans for Drug Price Relief Act](#) (2016), 149 Ohio St.3d 250, at ¶44.

⁴⁷State ex rel. Schwarz v. Hamilton Cty. Bd. of Elections (1962), 173 Ohio St. 321; [State ex rel. Curtis v. Summit Cty. Bd. of Elections](#) (2015), 144 Ohio St.3d 405 at ¶8.

⁴⁸[State ex rel. Citizens for Responsible Taxation v. Scioto Cty. Bd. of Elections](#) (1992), 65 Ohio St.3d 167.

For Petitions for Statewide Initiatives and Statewide Candidates

If a circulator says someone paid them but doesn't list the employer's address, the board must reject the entire part-petition.⁴⁹

If they don't mention an employer at all, or they give both the name and address of the employer, the board should accept that part of the circulator's statement as valid.

Section 13.10 Processing Voter Registration Forms

Before checking signatures, the board must first process:⁵⁰

All new, valid voter registrations.

All address or name changes.

For Statewide Petitions: Process any voter registrations or address updates that were received by the board or the Secretary of State's office as of the petition filing date.

For Local Petitions: Process any voter registrations or address changes that were received by the board as of the date the petition was filed with the board.

These registrations count as of the petition filing date.⁵¹

Enter any valid registrations received by the petition filing date into the county's voter registration database. See [Chapter 4, Section 4.05](#), for requirements on third parties who return another person's voter registration form.⁵²

⁴⁹[R.C. 3519.05](#); [R.C. 3519.06\(A\)](#).

⁵⁰[R.C. 3501.38\(A\)](#); [R.C. 3519.15](#); [State ex rel. Oster vs. Lorain Cty. Bd. of Elections, 93 Ohio St. 3d 480 \(2001\)](#).

⁵¹[R.C. 3501.38](#); [R.C. 3503.19](#).

⁵²[R.C. 3599.11\(B\)\(2\)\(a\)](#).

Section 13.11 Petition Signers

WHO CAN SIGN PETITIONS

Signers must be:

- ☐ Qualified Ohio electors.⁵³
- ☐ Registered to vote at the address on the petition when it was filed.⁵⁴
- ☐ For partisan primary petitions, a member of the candidate's political party (they voted in that party's primary election, or didn't vote in any other party's primary election in the past two calendar years).⁵⁵

Other rules:

- ☐ For statewide issue petitions, the key date is the date that the board examines the petition.⁵⁶
- ☐ A candidate who signs their own nominating petition doesn't count toward the required minimum number of signatures.⁵⁷
- ☐ 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the election can sign if registered.⁵⁸
- ☐ Voters of any affiliation or no affiliation may sign an independent or a nonpartisan office petition.

RULES ABOUT SIGNATURES⁵⁹

Valid signatures must be:

Original signature of that voter⁶⁰ (see also **Signing for Voters with Disabilities**).

Matching the signature in the board records.⁶¹

⁵³[R.C. 3501.38\(A\)](#).

⁵⁴[R.C. 3501.38\(A\)](#).

⁵⁵[R.C. 3513.05, 17](#).

⁵⁶[R.C. 3519.15](#).

⁵⁷*State ex rel. Kucinich v. Duffy (1970)*, 22 Ohio St.2d 61, 61-62.

⁵⁸[R.C. 3503.06\(B\); 3503.07](#).

⁵⁹[R.C. 3501.011](#).

⁶⁰[R.C. 3501.38\(B\)](#). Generally, signing or affixing a signature to an election-related document requires a person's written, cursive-style legal mark written in that person's own hand. However, voters with a disability may personally affix their signature through the use of a reasonable accommodation, including the use of assistive technology or an augmentative device such as a signature stamp. See [R.C. 3501.011](#), [R.C. 3501.382\(F\)](#) and related [OAG 2015-012](#).

⁶¹If a board of elections has conducted a hearing concerning the consideration of signatures on a candidate or issue petition, it must not disregard evidence produced at that hearing. See *State ex rel. Scott v. Franklin County Board of Elections (2014)*, 139 Ohio St.3d

Written in ink.⁶²

Accept signatures when:

- ☐ Nicknames are used but board employees can confirm their identity of the elector (example: “Jack” for John or “Peg” for Margaret).⁶³
- ☐ Middle initials are included or left out.
- ☐ Electors add their printed name on the petition along with their cursive name.⁶⁴
- ☐ Someone else filled in “non-signature information” (such as printed name, address, county, or the date of signing).⁶⁵

If someone signs more than once:

- ☐ Count only their first valid signature.
- ☐ Mark all later ones as invalid.
- ☐ Mark and track the duplicate.

SIGNER’S ADDRESS

The petition must show where the signer lives, including:

House number.

Street name or Rural Free Delivery (RFD) number.

City, village, or township.

The petition is not required to have the signer’s:

Ward and precinct.

Most board voter registration software systems can record if each signature is valid or invalid. They also can track for duplicate signatures over time and should be able to track more than one petition at a time. These systems should also be able to produce reports of the names, addresses, and valid/invalid code for every signature board employees review.

If the system can’t do these things, or the board does not use that part of the system, contact the Elections Division at ElectionAdmin@OhioSoS.gov.

171; “if undisputed evidence shows a nonmatching signature to be genuine, then the board must count the signature even if it does not match the elector’s legal mark on the voter-registration record” [State ex rel. Crowl v. Delaware Cty. Bd. of Elections](#) (2015), 144 Ohio St.3d 346; [State ex rel. Burroughs v. Summit Cty. Bd. of Elections](#) (2015), 145 Ohio St.3d 220.

⁶²[R.C. 3501.38\(B\)](#).

⁶³[State ex rel. Rogers v. Taft](#) (1992), 64 Ohio St.3d 193.

⁶⁴[R.C. 3501.38\(B\)](#).

⁶⁵[State ex rel. Jeffries v. Ryan](#) (1969), 21 Ohio App.2d 241.

Apartment number.

It is not acceptable for the signer's address to be:

A post office box.

Different from board records of the elector's address. If the elector's address is different from board records:

- Usually, invalidate that signature⁶⁶
- Exception: they used a postal format instead of political subdivision (for instance, writing "Columbus" as the city when the elector's political subdivision is "Perry Township"). Do not reject a signature just because of this type of difference.

SIGNING FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

While signatures usually must be written by the voter, some electors with disabilities can't physically sign their own name. The law allows these voters to use assistive technology or devices, like a stamp,⁶⁷ or an "attorney in fact."⁶⁸

How it works:

The voter with a disability authorizes someone to sign for them.

This person is called their "attorney in fact."

The voter and attorney in fact must complete [Form 10-F](#) or [Form 10-G](#).

The attorney in fact signs the voter's name while the voter is present.

The board must compare this signature on the petition with the document on file with the board office ([Form 10-F](#) or [Form 10-G](#)).⁶⁹

The properly appointed helper may sign the voter's name to the petition while the voter is present and directs them to do so (acting as an attorney-in-fact under [R.C. 3501.382](#)).

Note: Regular power of attorney documents don't work for election materials. The voter must file [Form 10-F](#) or [Form 10-G](#) with the board.

⁶⁶[R.C. 3501.38\(C\)](#); [R.C. 3519.10](#).

⁶⁷[R.C. 3501.011](#); [R.C. 3501.382\(F\)](#); [OAG 2015-012](#).

⁶⁸[R.C. 3501.382](#).

⁶⁹[R.C. 3501.382\(B\)\(1\)](#).

If someone signs for another person without proper authorization, the board must, at a minimum, invalidate that signature. If the board determines that the circulator knew it was wrong, invalidate the entire part-petition.⁷⁰

DATES

Each signature must be followed by the date.⁷¹ Rules about dates:

Don't reject a signature just because dates are out of order on a petition.

On nominating petitions, reject signatures dated more than one year before filing.⁷²

ILLEGIBLE SIGNATURES

The board must invalidate illegible signatures. A signature is illegible only if BOTH the signature and address are unreadable. If that is the case, board employees can't search the board system to verify the voter.⁷³

DITTO MARKS

Signers can use ditto marks (") to show repeat information such as:⁷⁴

Same date as above.

Same address as above.

Same county as above.

SIGNATURES FROM ONE COUNTY ONLY PER PART-PETITION

Ohio law says each part-petition can only have signatures of electors from one county. If a part-petition contains signatures from more than one county:

- ☐ First, figure out which county has the most signatures.⁷⁵ If most signatures are from your county, process and verify all signatures on the part-petition, but reject any signatures from other counties.
- ☐ Only count and verify the signatures from the majority county.
- ☐ Invalidate any signatures from other counties.

⁷⁰R.C. 3501.38(F).

⁷¹R.C. 3501.38(Q).

⁷²R.C. 3513.262; R.C. 3513.263.

⁷³State ex rel. Owens v. Brunner (2010), 125 Ohio St.3d 130.

⁷⁴State ex rel. Donofrio v. Henderson (1965), 4 Ohio App.2d 183.

⁷⁵R.C. 3513.05, 19; R.C. 3519.10.

- ☐ If most signatures are from a different county, do not process the petitions.
- ☐ For local races, contact the board with the most signatures and the board for the county that is most populous (if a multicounty district) for the specific type of petition filing. Transfer the part-petition to the director or deputy director of that board.
- ☐ For statewide races or issues, use the specific Secretary of State's office guidance on the transfer of petitions for review of that statewide race or issue.

NON-GENUINE SIGNATURES

Only reject the signature of someone not qualified to sign the petition; other valid signatures on the part-petition can be counted. Exception: If a circulator knows but still allows an unqualified person to sign a petition, that petition paper should be invalidated.⁷⁶

Section 13.12 Marking Signatures

The board is responsible for checking each signature for validity. Check each signature one by one.

If a signature is valid, place a check mark in the margin to the left of the signature.

If a signature is invalid, write the appropriate code in the margin to the left of the signature showing why it's invalid.

Use a red ink pen for making these marks.

After checking an entire part-petition, write on the right side of the front page both the number of valid signatures and the initials of the board employee who checked it.

⁷⁶[R.C. 3501.38\(F\)](#).

INVALIDATION REASON CODES

CAN	Candidate	Candidate Petitions Only. Candidate signed his or her own petition.
CIR	Circulator	Signed as an elector the part-petition they were circulating. (This invalidates the circulator's signature as a signer, but not the entire part petition.)
DUP	Duplicate	The person signed more than one part-petition or twice on the same part-petition.
EXP	Expired Signature	Candidate Petitions Only. Candidate petition was signed more than one year before filing.
ILL	Illegible	Both the signature and address are unreadable, so that it is impossible to check the signature against a voter registration record.
NA	No Address	The signer didn't provide their complete address: house number and street name or RFD, and the appropriate city, village, or township. If board officials can figure out the county from other information given, a missing county name isn't fatal. Ward and precinct information is not required.
ND	No Date	The petition doesn't show when the signature was made. (However, acceptable are: month-date-year, month-date, date out of sequence with other signers' dates, ditto marks.)
NG	Not Genuine	The signature doesn't appear to be genuine compared to the signature on file with the board as of the date the board checks the petition.
NR	Not Registered	The signer is not registered to vote. Signers must be qualified electors as of the date the petition is filed or, for a statewide issue petition, as of the date that the board examines the petition.
NRA	Not Registered Address	The address on the petition paper is not the address on file with the board as of the date petition is filed, or for statewide issue petitions, as of the date the board examines the petition.
OC	Other County	The signer lives in another county. Do not cross out signature or address; just place this code in the left margin.
P	Pencil	The signature was written using a pencil.
PC	Photocopy	The circulator's signature is a photocopy and is not an original signature.
WJ	Wrong Jurisdiction	The signer lives in another jurisdiction within the county. Don't cross out signature or address; just place this code in the left margin.
WP	Wrong Party	Candidate Petitions Only. The circulator or signer belongs to a different political party than the one listed on the declaration of candidacy.

Section 13.13 State Issue and Referendum Certification, Challenges and Protests

CERTIFICATION

After checking all the part-petitions, certify the board's findings to the Secretary of State on a certification form.

The board must return verified part-petitions to the Secretary of State's office at least 110 days before the election. The Secretary of State's office will decide if there are enough signatures by the 105th day before the election.⁷⁷

After getting reports from all of the county boards, the Secretary of State will determine if the petition is valid and has enough signatures. They will then notify the petitioners as required.⁷⁸

ADDITIONAL SIGNATURES

If a petition doesn't have enough valid signatures, the issue committee has 10 more days to collect and file more signatures. When this happens, the Secretary of State will:

- Post the extra petition form on their website.⁷⁹

- Tell the committee chairperson about the shortage and provide forms.⁸⁰

- Send the extra petition form to boards of elections, which must provide a copy to anyone who asks.⁸¹

The committee can only submit additional signatures on the form provided by the Secretary of State. Only signatures collected during the 10-day period can be submitted.⁸²

The board then has eight days from getting the extra signatures to check and return them to the Secretary of State's office. The Secretary will decide if the extra signatures are enough by the 65th day before the election.⁸³

⁷⁷[R.C. 3519.16\(E\)](#).

⁷⁸[R.C. 3519.16](#); *see* [Article II, Section 1g, Ohio Constitution](#).

⁷⁹[R.C. 3519.16\(F\)](#).

⁸⁰[R.C. 3519.16\(F\)](#).

⁸¹[R.C. 3519.05\(D\)](#); [R.C. 3519.16\(F\)](#).

⁸²[R.C. 3519.16\(F\)](#).

⁸³[R.C. 3519.16\(F\)](#).

CHALLENGES/PROTESTS

Only the Supreme Court of Ohio can hear challenges to state issue petitions and signatures.⁸⁴ Don't accept protests at the board office. Challenges must be filed with the Supreme Court of Ohio no later than 95 days before the election.⁸⁵

When checking part-petitions and signatures, only follow guidance from the Secretary of State's office or board legal counsel.

⁸⁴ [Art.II, §1g of the Ohio Constitution](#); [R.C. 3519.16](#).

⁸⁵ [Art.II, §1g of the Ohio Constitution](#).

Chapter 13 Checklist: Petitions

Before Petition Filing Season

- ☐ Download and maintain the most current petition forms from the Secretary of State's website.
- ☐ Review and understand the petition requirements in the [Ohio Candidate Requirement Guide](#).
- ☐ Train staff on proper petition review procedures.
- ☐ Prepare supplies (red pens for marking, etc.).

When Providing Forms to Candidates/Issue Groups

- ☐ Verify board employees are providing the most current form version from the Secretary of State's website.
- ☐ Provide candidates with relevant guidebooks ([Candidate Requirement Guide](#), etc.).
- ☐ Explain the filing process without pre-checking petitions.

When Petitions Are Filed

- ☐ Verify filing fee is paid.
- ☐ Process any new voter registrations or changes received by the filing date.
- ☐ Make sure the board Voter Registration Database is current.
- ☐ Provide the filer with a copy of [R.C. 3517.21](#) on unfair campaign practices and get written acknowledgment.

Circulator Requirements and Part-Petition Review

- ☐ Verify circulator's statement is complete and properly signed.
- ☐ Check if circulator meets qualifications (age, party affiliation if required).
- ☐ Ensure statewide petitions include circulator's name and address.

- ☐ Check if circulator's employer information is required and included (for statewide petitions).
- ☐ Determine if the petition contains signatures from only one county.
- ☐ Note the number of signatures claimed versus actual signatures.

Signature Verification

- ☐ Verify each signature against voter records in the board system.
- ☐ Check if signers are registered at the address listed.
- ☐ Ensure signatures match those on file.
- ☐ Check that signers are qualified electors.
- ☐ Verify partisan primary petition signers are members of the stated party.
- ☐ Check that signatures are in ink and dated.
- ☐ Look for duplicate signatures.

Documentation

- ☐ Mark valid signatures with a check mark.
- ☐ Mark invalid signatures with the appropriate code explaining why.
- ☐ Document the total number of valid signatures on the front of each part-petition.
- ☐ Initial the front of each part-petition after review.
- ☐ Maintain accurate records of all petition reviews.

Special Circumstances

- ☐ Handle attorney-in-fact signatures properly, verifying against Form [10-F](#) or [Form 10-G](#).
- ☐ Address issues with illegible signatures.
- ☐ Address part-petitions with signatures from multiple counties.
- ☐ Investigate any evidence of fraud or irregularities.

When Processing Completed Part-Petitions for Statewide Issues or Referendum

- ☐ Sort part-petitions into valid and invalid groups.
- ☐ Complete the certification form with the board's findings.
- ☐ Return all part-petitions and the board certification to the Secretary of State by the deadline.

If Supplemental Petitions Are Filed:

- ☐ Check signatures within eight days of receipt.
- ☐ Make sure signatures were collected during the 10-day supplemental period.
- ☐ Verify signatures appear on the official supplemental form.

Remember

- ☐ Only the Supreme Court of Ohio can hear challenges to statewide petitions.
- ☐ Only follow guidance from the Secretary of State or your county prosecutor.
- ☐ Document any evidence of fraud and report it to the Secretary of State.