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**DIRECTIVE 2013-17**

September 3, 2013

To: All County Boards of Elections  
Directors, Deputy Directors, and Board Members

Re: Instructions Regarding the Examination and Verification of State Issue Petitions

**SUMMARY**

This Directive provides county boards of elections with specific instructions on examining and validating statewide initiative, referendum, and constitutional amendment petitions consistent with R.C. 3501.11(K).

This Directive replaces Directives 2011-17 and 2011-22.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

**I. CIRCULATORS**

**A. Qualifications**

A circulator must be at least 18 years of age and an Ohio resident.<sup>1</sup>

Some convicted felons are prohibited from circulating initiative or referendum petitions.<sup>2</sup> State law does not require a circulator to provide key data points (e.g., date of birth, social security number, drivers license number, etc.) that constitute "satisfactory evidence" that the individual who circulated a petition in any given county is indeed the same individual who may be listed in one county's local voter registration database as cancelled due to incarceration of a felony conviction.

When verifying petitions, boards of elections should presume that a circulator is qualified to circulate petitions, unless there is "satisfactory evidence" that the individual is not qualified. Any protests against a circulator's qualifications should be made before the Ohio Supreme Court as described in Section VI below.

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<sup>1</sup> R.C.3503.06(C).

<sup>2</sup> Ohio Attorney General Advisory Opinion 2010-02.

## B. Circulator's Statement

Each part-petition must contain a circulator's statement (identified on the part-petition as the "statement of the solicitor") that includes the following completed information:<sup>3</sup>

- The number of signatures witnessed by the circulator;
- The circulator's signature;
- The circulator's permanent residence address<sup>4</sup> in this state; and
- If the circulator was employed to circulate the petition, then the employer's name and address including street name and number, or post office box number, city, state, and zip code.

The Board must review each part-petition to determine that information required as a part of the circulator's statement is entered on each part-petition. The Board must accept the circulator statements of part-petitions at face value unless there are inconsistencies with the number of signatures witnessed (see below) or with information about the circulator across part-petitions reviewed within a single county (i.e., the circulator writes different permanent residence addresses on different part-petition).

If the circulator reported witnessing fewer than the total number of uncrossed out signatures submitted on the part-petition, then the Board must invalidate the entire part-petition.<sup>5</sup>

*Example:* The circulator's statement indicates 20 signatures witnessed, but there are 22 signatures on the petition, none of which were crossed out prior to the petition being filed. This part-petition must be rejected.

If the circulator reported witnessing the same or more than the total number of signatures not crossed out on the part-petition, then the Board must not invalidate the part-petition for this reason alone.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the Board must review the validity of each signature as usual.

*Example:* The circulator's statement indicates that the circulator witnessed 22 signatures, but there are only 20 signatures on the petition.

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<sup>3</sup> R.C. 3519.05.

<sup>4</sup> State law does not define "permanent residence address" for purposes of circulating issue petitions. A county 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 as described in Section VI below.

<sup>5</sup> *Rust v. Lucas Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 108 Ohio St.3d 139, 141, 841 N.E.2d 766, (Ohio 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *State ex rel. Citizens for Responsible Taxation v. Scioto Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 65 Ohio St.3d 167, 602 N.E.2d 615 (Ohio 1992).

Ohio law requires that on a circulator's statement for a statewide initiative or referendum petition (and a declaration of candidacy or nominating petition for a statewide candidate), "the circulator shall identify the circulator's name, the address of the circulator's permanent residence, and the name and address of the person employing the circulator to circulate the petition, if any."<sup>7</sup>

If a circulator identifies an employer on the circulator's statement but does not provide a corresponding address, the Board must invalidate the entire part-petition.<sup>8</sup> If no employer or address is provided or if both the name of the employer and an address are provided, that aspect of the circulator's statement is presumed, on its face, to be valid and sufficient.

## II. PROCESSING VOTER REGISTRATIONS

Each county board of elections must process all new, valid voter registrations and changes of names and/or address to existing registrations received by the Board or the Secretary of State's Office as of the date the petition was filed with the Secretary of State before verifying the signatures on the part-petitions.<sup>9</sup>

These registrations are effective as of the date filed with the Secretary of State.<sup>10</sup>

Registrations gathered as a part of the petition process are to be submitted to the office of the Secretary of State or a county board of elections within ten days after that registration form is completed.<sup>11</sup> Any otherwise valid voter registration form received in violation of this section, but received by the close of registration, should be entered into the county's voter registration database.

## III. SIGNERS

### A. Qualifications

Each person who signs a petition must be a qualified elector of Ohio and registered to vote at the address provided on the petition as of the date the state issue part-petition is examined by the Board.<sup>12</sup>

### B. Signatures

Except as provided in R.C. 3501.382 (elector's name signed by an attorney-in-fact), each signature must be an original signature of that voter.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> R.C.3501.38(E)(1).

<sup>8</sup> R.C.3519.06(A).

<sup>9</sup> R.C. 3501.38(A); 3519.15.

<sup>10</sup> R.C. 3501.38; 3503.19.

<sup>11</sup> R.C. 3599.11(B)(2)(a).

<sup>12</sup> R.C. 3519.10.

<sup>13</sup> R.C. 3501.38(B); 3519.051

The signature must match the signature on file with the board of elections. A Board must not invalidate a signature because an elector signed using a derivative of his/her first name, if the Board can confirm the identity of the elector.<sup>14</sup>

*Example:* Name derivatives are acceptable (Bob instead of Robert, Peg instead of Margaret) and lack of middle initial or inclusion of middle initial is acceptable.

For identification purposes, the elector may print his or her name on the petition *in addition* to signing in cursive his or her name to the petition. A printed signature alone, with no cursive signature, is allowed only if the elector's signature on file with the Board is also printed.<sup>15</sup>

The signature must be written in ink.<sup>16</sup>

The petition must contain the elector's voting residence including the house number and street name or rural free delivery (RFD) number, and the appropriate city, village, or township. The elector's ward and precinct are not required. A post office box does not qualify as an elector's residence address. If an elector's address given on the petition differs from that on file with the Board, then the Board must invalidate that signature.<sup>17</sup>

An elector's signature must not be invalidated solely because "non-signature information" (e.g., the elector's printed name, address, county, or the date of signing) was completed by another person. Non-signature information may be added by a person other than the elector, at the direction and in the presence of the petition signer, which should be presumed unless there is evidence to the contrary.<sup>18</sup>

No one may sign a petition more than once. If a person does sign a petition more than once, after the first signature has been marked valid, each successive occurrence of the signature must be invalidated.

*Note:* Most software systems deployed by county boards of elections are capable of electronically recording decisions on the validity or invalidity of each signature on a petition and tracking for duplicate signatures over time (including in those instances where petitioners are permitted to file supplemental petitions after an initial finding by the Secretary of State that the petition lacks sufficient signatures). These systems should be able to track more than one petition at a time. Additionally, these software systems should be able to produce an electronic file and a printed report of the names, addresses, and valid/invalid code for every

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<sup>14</sup> *State ex rel. Rogers v. Taft*, 64 Ohio St.3d 193, 594 N.E.2d 576 (Ohio 1992).

<sup>15</sup> R.C. 3501.011; 3501.38(B); 3519.10.

<sup>16</sup> R.C. 3519.051; 3501.38(B).

<sup>17</sup> R.C.3501.38(C); 3519.10.

<sup>18</sup> *State ex rel. Jeffries v. Ryan*, 21 Ohio App.2d 241, 256 N.E.2d 716 (Ohio App.10 Dist. 1969).

signature reviewed by the Board. If your county software system cannot provide any of these, or the Board does not use that system component, please contact the Elections Division to ensure an adequate method that adequately and accurately records information to fulfill reporting and tracking standards.

### **C. Attorney-In-Fact**

A registered elector who, by reason of disability, is unable to physically sign his or her name to a petition may authorize a qualified individual as an attorney-in -act to sign the elector's name to a petition in accordance with R.C. 3501.382.

In order to sign a petition on behalf of a registered voter as that person's attorney-in-fact, the Board must have a completed [Secretary of State Form 10-F](#) or [10-G](#) on file. Other types of power of attorney documents, filed with a court or some other agency, will not allow an individual to sign election documents on another's behalf. The proper documentation must be on file with the board of elections.

A qualified person who has been appointed as an elector's attorney-in-fact under R.C. 3501.382 may sign that elector's name to the petition paper in the elector's presence and at the elector's direction. The Board must compare the attorney-in-fact's signature on the petition with Form 10-F or 10-G on file with the Board.

If a person, who has not been designated the attorney-in-fact for elections purposes, signs another person's name to a petition, then the Board must, at a minimum, invalidate that signature. If the Board determines that the circulator knowingly permitted an unqualified person to sign on another person's behalf, then the entire part-petition must be invalidated.<sup>19</sup>

### **D. Dates**

Each signature must be followed by the date it was affixed to the petition paper.<sup>20</sup>

The Board must not invalidate a signature solely because its date is out of sequence with other signatures on the same part petition.

### **E. Illegible Signature**

The Board must invalidate illegible signatures. A signature is illegible only if both the signature and address are unreadable, such that it is impossible for board personnel to query the board's voter registration system to check the signature against a voter registration record.<sup>21</sup>

### **F. Ditto Marks**

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<sup>19</sup> R.C. 3501.38(F).

<sup>20</sup> R.C. 3501.38(C); 3519.10.

<sup>21</sup> *State ex rel. Owens v. Brunner*, 125 Ohio St.3d 130, 926 N.E.2d 617 (Ohio 2010).

Ditto marks may be used to indicate duplicate information, e.g. date, address, or county.<sup>22</sup>

### **G. One County per Part-Petition**

Each part-petition should contain signatures of electors of only one county. The Board must invalidate signatures from any other county. If any part-petition contains signatures from more than one county, then the Secretary of State determines the county with the most signatures on the part-petition, and only signatures from that county are to be reviewed.<sup>23</sup>

If, upon review by a county board of elections, the Board believes that a part-petition was improperly forwarded to the county, the Director and Deputy Director should contact the Secretary of State's Office, which will review the part-petition again.

### **H. Non-Genuine Signatures**

A board of elections must not invalidate an entire part-petition based solely on the number of non-genuine signatures it contains. If a circulator knowingly allows an unqualified person to sign a part-petition, the entire petition must be invalidated.<sup>24</sup>

## **IV. MARKING SIGNATURES**

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

If a signature is invalid, indicate why it is invalid by writing in the margin to the left of the signature the appropriate code symbol for the reason the signature is invalid (see attached).

It is advisable to use a red ink pen for making marks by the Board.

## **V. CERTIFICATION**

After the board staff has examined all the parts of the statewide issue, referendum, or constitutional amendment petition circulated in your county, you must certify your findings to the Secretary of State on a certification form.

Once certification forms have been received from all of the county boards of elections, the Secretary of State will determine the validity and sufficiency of the petition and provide the constitutionally and statutorily required notices to the committee for the petitioners. If the Secretary of State determines that the petition is insufficient, the committee will have ten additional days after notification to file additional signatures.

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<sup>22</sup> *State ex rel. Donofrio v. Henderson*, 4 Ohio App.2d 183, 211 N.E.2d 854 (Ohio App. 7 Dist. 1965).

<sup>23</sup> R.C. 3519.10.

<sup>24</sup> R.C. 3501.38(F).

## VI. CHALLENGES/PROTESTS

The Ohio Supreme Court has original, exclusive jurisdiction over all challenges to state issue petitions and signatures on those petitions.<sup>25</sup> No protests may be filed with county boards of elections concerning state issue petitions. Any challenge to a petition or signature shall be filed with Ohio Supreme Court not later than ninety-five days before the day of the election.<sup>26</sup>

It is not proper for a county board of elections to be influenced in its validation of part-petitions or signatures contained on them by opinions, communications, or information not originating from the Secretary of State's Office, the board's statutory legal counsel, or its county prosecuting attorney.

If you have any questions regarding this Directive, please contact the Secretary of State's elections counsel assigned to your county at (614) 466-2585.

Sincerely,



Jon Husted

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<sup>25</sup> Art.II, §1g of the Ohio Constitution; R.C.3519.16.

<sup>26</sup> Art.II, §1g of the Ohio Constitution.

## CODE SYMBOLS FOR VALIDATING SIGNATURES ON PETITIONS

Each signature must be individually examined. If a signature is valid, place a check mark at the left margin beside it.

If a signature is not valid, please indicate the reason by using the following initials or, if no set of initials applies, an explanatory notation:

- CIR Circulator signed as an elector on the part-petition he or she was circulating. (This invalidates the circulator's signature as a signer, but not the entire part-petition.)
- DUP "Duplicate signature." The person has signed more than one part-petition or twice on the same part-petition.
- ILL "Illegible" applies only if both the signature and address are unreadable, such that it is impossible for board personnel to query the board's voter registration system to check the signature against a voter registration record.
- NA "No address." The signer's complete address must be provided: house number and street name or RFD, and the appropriate city, village, or township. Ward and precinct information is not required.
- ND "No Date." The petition does not indicate the date on which the signature was affixed. (However, acceptable are: month-date-year, month-date, date out of sequence with other signers' dates, ditto marks.)
- NG "Not Genuine." The signature on the petition does not appear to be the genuine signature of the person whose signature it purports to be when compared to the signature on file with the board of elections as of the date the Board checks the petition.
- NR "Not Registered." The signer is not registered to vote. Each person who signs a petition paper must be a qualified elector as of the date the Board examines the petition.
- NRA "Not Registered Address." The address provided on the petition paper is not the address on file with the board of elections as of the date the Board examines the petition.
- OC "Other County." The signer is a resident of some other county. Do not cross out signature or address; instead, place code at left margin.
- P "Pencil." The signature was written using a pencil.

If the number of signatures on a part-petition is more than the number indicated by the circulator, the entire part-petition is invalid.

When invalidating an entire part-petition, indicate the reason for rejection on the front of that part-petition and separate it from any valid part-petitions. **Do not invalidate a part-petition for the sole reason that it does not contain any valid signatures; it is a valid part-petition, but it contains zero, or no, valid signatures.**

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