



*Washington Secretary of State*

# CLEARINGHOUSE

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## ELECTIONS NOTICE

Issue #12-04  
June 4, 2012

## Write-in Voting

To promote consistency throughout Washington State, the requirements for write-in voting are summarized below. New legislation and WACs for declared write-in candidates and PCO races are included. This information replaces Clearinghouse #10-04 issued July 21, 2010.

### Write-in Candidates

There are two ways a person may become a write-in candidate.

- Any person wishing to be a write-in candidate may file a [Declaration of Write-in Candidacy](#). The declaration must be filed no later than **18 days** prior to an election or primary. Precinct Committee Officer (PCO) candidates must file during the regular filing period and may not declare as write-in candidates.
- Any voter wishing to write in the name of a person for any office, other than PCO, may do so. Write-in candidates are not required to file a declaration in order for the votes to be counted.

### Declared Write-in Candidates

There are several requirements for declaring a write-in candidacy. Candidates must pay the appropriate filing fee and meet the same qualifications as regularly filed candidates. Write-in candidates must file with the appropriate filing officer no later than 18 days prior to an election.

Each County Auditor's Office will be notified of any declared write-in candidates for state and federal offices filing with the Secretary of State. County Auditors must notify the election workers responsible for inspecting ballots of any declared write-in candidates **prior to initial processing** of the ballots. (RCW 29A.24.320)

The filing officer for multi-county districts must provide candidate filing information to any county within the district as soon as possible and prior to initial processing.

## **Political Party Preference**

For most partisan offices, write-in votes do **not** need to indicate a party preference. Only write-in votes cast for the office of President/Vice-President require indication of a political party. There is no write-in voting for PCO races.

Candidates for all other partisan offices are not party nominees; therefore, a party preference is not required to be written in by the voter.

## **Reporting Write-in Votes**

Vote tabulation systems tabulate write-in votes only when the response area is marked (or resolved). The County Cumulative Report must include the number of write-in votes, overvotes and undervotes tabulated. The report, as part of the certification of the election, is transmitted electronically to the Secretary of State immediately following certification as per RCW 29A.60.230 (1).

## **Determining When to Tally Write-in Votes**

Using results from the County Cumulative Report, two steps are required to determine **when** write-in votes must be counted for individual candidates.

**Step 1.** Add the number of write-ins, overvotes and undervotes to determine the total of potential write-in votes for a race.

**Step 2.** Compare the total calculated in Step 1 as follows:

### **For single-candidate races:**

- a. Primary Election. When the number of potential write-in votes is at least 1% of the total votes cast for the office, individual write-in votes must be tallied.
- b. General Election. When the number of potential write-in votes exceeds the number of votes cast for the single candidate, individual write-in votes must be tallied.

### **For multi-candidate races:**

- a. Primary Election. Subtract the votes for the 3<sup>rd</sup> place candidate from the votes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> place candidate. If the total number of write-ins, overvotes and undervotes is more than the *difference* between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place candidates, then individual write-in votes must be tallied.
- b. General Election. Subtract the votes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> place candidate from the votes for the 1<sup>st</sup> place candidate. If the total number of

write-ins, overvotes and undervotes, is more than the *difference* between the two candidates, then individual write-in votes must be tallied.

**Example.** The General Election results for County Dogcatcher are:

Candidate A	1000 votes
Candidate B	950 votes
Write-ins	35 votes
Overvotes	3 votes
Undervotes	19 votes

Step 1: The sum of Write-ins, Overvotes, and Undervotes equals 57 votes.

Step 2: The difference between candidate A and B is 50.

Because 57 (the total of write-ins, overvotes and undervotes) is more than 50 (the *difference* between the two candidates), write-in votes must be tallied in the above example.

### **Multi-County Districts**

For multi-county races, apply the above steps to the votes cast in your county (Step 1, Step 2). If it appears that write-in votes need to be tallied in your county, please report the information immediately to the appropriate Filing Officer.

All counties in the district should be notified by the Filing Officer.

### **How to Tally Write-in Votes for Individual Candidates** (WAC 434-262-160)

When tallying write-in votes for individual candidates, all ballots with overvotes, undervotes and write-ins for that race must be reviewed for valid votes.

- The County Auditor may use the VRDB before **each election** to verify whether a write-in candidate is registered to vote. Checking the VRDB is optional, however, if it can be determined that no one by a specific name is registered in the state or district, the votes need not be tallied. For example, votes for Mickey Mouse, None of the Above, etc., are valid unless the elections department verifies that the candidate is not registered in the district.
- The County Canvassing Board shall exercise all reasonable efforts to determine the voter's intent. The Statewide Standards on What is a Vote must be applied to write-in votes. (WAC 434-261-086 and 434-262-160)
- If a write-in candidate lost the same race in the Primary, either as a regular candidate printed on the ballot or as a declared write-in, that candidate is

ineligible and write-in votes are not tallied. (RCW 29A.24.311 and RCW 29A.60.021)

**For single-county districts**, tallying write-in votes may stop once enough write-in votes, overvotes and undervotes have been tallied to make it mathematically impossible for the results to change and a recount is not indicated.

**Example.** The General Election results for County Exterminator are:

Candidate A	1000 votes
Candidate B	850 votes
Write-ins/overvotes/undervotes	165

In this example, 165 possible votes for a write-in candidate are not enough to overtake the 1000 votes received by Candidate A. However, if Candidate B received 150 or more write-in votes out of the 165, it could affect the outcome of the race. Additionally, if Candidate B received enough write-in votes, the total could trigger a mandatory recount. In this case, it is necessary to tally write-ins, overvotes and undervotes to ensure that there are not enough write-in votes left to tally to give Candidate B the majority or to cause a mandatory recount.

### **Precinct Committee Officer**

E3HSB 1860 amends RCW 29A.24.311 and 29A.60.021 to state that there are no write-in candidates permitted for the office of PCO. A write-in line must not be printed on the ballot. If a voter wishes to write in a candidate for PCO, it should be ignored.

If the voter did not vote for any PCO candidates printed on the ballot and attempted to mark a write-in candidate, this would be tabulated as an undervote.

If the voter marked the target area for a PCO candidate printed on the ballot and also attempted to mark a write-in, the vote for the printed candidate **will count**. This is not considered an overvote.

**Corrections** made by the voter regarding PCO candidates already printed on the ballot are permitted. If the voter attempts to correct a vote in a contested PCO race, rules for voter intent must be followed.

Any write-in votes cast for this office will not be tallied.