

FAQs about Ballot Printing, Custody & Security

How do you ensure the ballot printing process is secure from start to finish?

Voters can rest assured that we continuously account for all ballots printed for and provided to Loudoun County. Our office submits a ballot order to the printer and then, prior to using or deploying any ballots for the election, verifies that the correct number were received at the office.

Additionally, during the early voting period or on Election Day, staff and/or election officers regularly compare “the number of voters checked in” against “the number of ballots issued” and “the number inserted into the voting machine.” This count is finalized at the end of each early voting day or Election Day to ensure that no discrepancies occurred. This reconciliation process would quickly alert staff and election officers if any ballots were illegally brought into the precinct, and we would take appropriate action.

The current Virginia Code requires that several ‘oaths’ be completed by the printer, print shop employees, Office of Elections and Voter Registration staff, and others throughout the printing process. These oaths include statements that:

- Only the ballots requested will be printed
- The correct number were printed
- The seal of the Loudoun County Electoral Board was applied
- The ballots were delivered to the Office of Elections as expected.

Due to changes in technology and printing processes, many of the code sections referring to ballot oaths have been found to be outdated. Our office is currently working with the Virginia Department of Elections to both update oaths as needed and ask the General Assembly for assistance with code-related issues.

In 2022, the Office of Elections and Voter Registration discovered that some printers who provide services for election offices in Virginia were technically “out of compliance” regarding the timing of the signing of the oaths. While the oaths were to have been signed by print vendors prior to the start of ballot printing, they were not signed until after printing had been completed. Our office is working with printing vendors and the Virginia Department of Elections to bring this area into compliance.

Who prints the ballots used in Loudoun County?

- Ballots to be used on Election Day are printed by our vendor, Election Services Online.
- Ballots used for mail voting are printed on-demand by our vendor, Fort Orange Press.
- Ballots used for Early Voting are printed on-demand on-site at each early voting location as each voter checks in

Why do we print ballots on demand for Early Voting?

Our office implemented ballot-on-demand in 2020 in order to speed up the check-in process and increase accuracy (for example, to reduce instances where a voter is issued an incorrect ballot style). With a ballot-on-demand system, the ballot is printed immediately upon the completion of voter check-in, so we know that each voter gets the right ballot every time. This change has been very popular with voters in Loudoun County and our staff has helped many other localities in Virginia implement ballot-on-demand based on our setup.

How do you determine how many ballots to order?

For most November General Elections, we order ballots equal to 110% of registered voters to accommodate all possible voters as well as provide extra ballots in case of voter errors. We now utilize ballot-on-demand for early voting, so we typically plan for early voting to account for 30% or so of the total turnout and adjust our Election Day and mail ballot order accordingly. We always make sure to have many more ballots on hand than we'll likely need. In 2020, when early voting was new and we had no idea how many people would vote early, we made sure to have enough ballots on hand for everyone to vote on Election Day AND enough ballot-on-demand stock on hand to accommodate up to 100,000 early voters. Every ballot is always accounted for, and all voted and unvoted (used and unused) ballots are turned over to the custody of the Clerk of the Circuit Court immediately after the election.

What do you do with the ballots after the election?

Per Virginia Code, the Clerk of the Circuit Court is the official custodian of all ballots, both voted and unvoted. At the conclusion of the canvass of results, all ballots are transferred to the Clerk of the Circuit Court for safekeeping.

- **Unvoted (unused)** ballots are kept in custody until the end of the recount/contest period and then destroyed.
- **Voted (used)** ballots are kept in custody for 2 years in Federal Elections, 1 year in all other elections, then destroyed.

How do you ensure only authorized ballots get into the voting equipment for counting?

Ballots can only be issued upon voter request.

For early or Election Day voting: The ballot is 'issued' when the voter appears and completes the check-in process. Throughout the day, our early and precinct voting teams continuously reconcile the number of voters checked in and the number of ballots issued with the number of ballots inserted into the equipment to ensure everything matches.

For mail voting: a voter submits a request (either online or via paper application) for a ballot by mail. A staff person then verifies the voter eligibility and approves or denies the request in the Virginia state voter registration system before the ballot is mailed. After the voter votes their ballot, they either mail it back or drop it in a drop box. When our office receives it a member of our staff verifies in the state voter registration system that the ballot was issued to the voter and the voter is still eligible to vote by mail (i.e. they didn't somehow manage to vote early in the meantime). Once the voter is marked as having returned their voted ballot, it is turned over to our Central Absentee Precinct (CAP) for processing. When the CAP gets the envelope with the ballot enclosed, it goes through one final check to ensure that the voter is still eligible, and everything was completed properly. Once all that is confirmed, the voter is 'checked in' just like at a precinct, the CAP team (one election officer from each party) opens the envelope and prepares the ballot for scanning.

What does the un-voted ballot chain-of-custody process look like?

Once printed, ballots are packaged and boxed for shipment to the Office of Elections. Upon arrival, they are inventoried for accuracy and then placed into an access-controlled room in the office. A few weeks before election day, two staff members or election officers from both political parties pack the ballots for the precincts. This process involves having both people count out the correct number of packs to be sent to the precinct, then place them into a box that has both person's signature on it. Once the ballots arrive at the precinct the seal is confirmed to be intact, then broken and two election officers

count the ballots inside to ensure the correct amount were received. All of these numbers are recorded on certification documents.

What does the voted ballot chain-of-custody process look like?

At the conclusion of voting, at least two election officers representing each party, open the back of the voting equipment ballot box and remove the ballots. The voted ballots are immediately placed into a box which is then securely closed and sealed with seals signed by the election officers. The box(es) of voted ballots are then returned to the office by the Chief Election Officer and an election officer representing the opposite party. Upon arrival at the office the box is checked to ensure that it was properly secured and sealed and then it is placed into secure storage for the night. The morning following the election staff from the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court takes possession of the boxes of voted ballots and transfers them to their secure storage where they are kept for the duration specified in the Virginia Code.

Ways you can help ensure your ballot was tallied when you vote:

1. Carefully read the instructions on the ballot and ensure you complete the ovals properly.
2. If you make a mistake, feel free to return your ballot and ask for a replacement.
3. Do not leave your ballot unattended while in the polling place.
4. Wait until your ballot goes completely into the machine before leaving.
5. Look for the 'Public Count' number on the screen of the scanner, make sure it goes up by 1 after you insert your ballot.