

**RULES  
OF  
STATE ELECTION BOARD**

**CHAPTER 183-1  
GEORGIA ELECTION CODE**

**SUBJECT 183-1-14  
ABSENTEE VOTING**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

183-1-14-0.9-.15 Processing Absentee Ballots Prior to Election Day

**RULE 183-1-14-0.9-.15 Processing Absentee Ballots Prior to Election Day**

- (1) Beginning at 8:00 a.m. on the third Monday prior to Election Day, county election superintendents shall be authorized to open the outer envelope of accepted absentee ballots, remove the contents including the absentee ballot, and scan the absentee ballot using one or more ballot scanners, in accordance with this rule, and may continue until all accepted absentee ballots are processed. All county election superintendents shall begin processing absentee ballots no later than the second Monday before Election Day. However, no person shall tally, tabulate, estimate or attempt to tally, tabulate or estimate or cause the voting equipment to produce any tally or tabulation, partial or otherwise, of the absentee votes cast until the time for the closing of the polls on Election Day.
- (2) Absentee ballots shall be processed in batches of not more than 100. At least three persons who are registrars, deputy registrars, poll workers, or absentee ballot clerks must be present at all times during the processing of a batch of absentee ballots.
- (3) Outer envelopes shall be opened in such a manner as not to destroy the oath and signature of the voter.
- (4) All outer envelopes in a batch shall be counted and recorded on a reconciliation form prior to opening the outer envelopes of a batch. Upon opening the outer envelopes of a batch, the contents shall be removed in a manner that ensures that the contents of the envelope cannot be matched back to the outer envelope. Once all of the outer envelopes of a batch have been opened and the contents removed, the inner envelopes and/or secrecy sleeves shall be opened and the absentee ballots removed. Once all of the absentee ballots have been removed, the number of ballots shall be counted and recorded on a reconciliation form and compared to the original count of outer envelopes in the batch. Any discrepancy shall be investigated and recorded on a reconciliation form. The form shall be signed by the officials processing the batch of ballots. The absentee ballots shall then be scanned on a ballot scanner. A batch number assigned by the ballot scanner shall be recorded on the reconciliation form for that batch. Any ballot that is so torn, bent, or otherwise defective that it cannot be processed by the scanner shall be duplicated pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-483. Vote review panels shall be established, as needed, to adjudicate any rejected ballots per O.C.G.A. § 21-2-483 and Rule

183-1-15-.02. Once successfully scanned, the batch of ballots shall be bound together with the reconciliation form (or a copy thereof) and the official who scanned the ballots shall notate on the reconciliation form that the batch has been scanned, including the date and location of the scanning, and initial the notation. The scanned absentee ballots shall then be secured in a container. More than one batch of scanned absentee ballots may be placed in the container, but the individual batches must be separately bound. A security seal shall be placed on the container. The batch number(s), the number of scanned absentee ballots in each batch, and the security seal number shall be recorded on the container.

- (5) If the county election superintendent chooses to prepare and/or scan absentee ballots prior to Election Day according to this Rule, the superintendent shall notify the Secretary of State in writing at least seven days prior to processing absentee ballots.
  
- (6) The proceedings described in this rule shall be open to the view of the public, but no person except one employed and designated for the purpose by the superintendent shall touch any ballot or ballot container. The state executive committee of each political party and political body having candidates whose names appear on the ballot in such county shall have the right to have two properly designated persons present to act as monitors for such process and each independent and nonpartisan candidate whose name appears on the ballot in such county shall have the right to have one properly designated person present to act as a monitor for such process. The designated monitors shall be given a letter by the designating entity containing the name of the monitor, his or her address, and the county in which he or she may monitor the process. A copy of the letter designating the monitor shall be delivered to the county elections superintendent prior to the monitor being allowed to monitor the process. Each monitor shall wear a name tag indicating their name and the entity that designated them while monitoring the process. Any other observer shall be required to wear a name tag that indicates their name and that they are a public observer. The superintendent may make reasonable regulations, including regulations regarding social distancing measures and required personal protective equipment, that designated monitors and observers shall follow so that they do not interfere in any way with the processing of ballots or conduct of the election. If a monitor or observer interferes with the processing of the ballots or conduct of the election after being duly warned by an election official or superintendent, or if he or she violates any of the prohibited activities in this rule, the superintendent may revoke the person's designation to monitor the process, remove them from any further monitoring or observing, and refer the incident to the Secretary of State's office for investigation. Any infraction or irregularity observed by a monitor or observer shall be reported to the superintendent or to the Secretary of State. No person whose name is on the ballot shall be eligible to serve as a designated monitor.
  
- (7) While viewing the process set forth in this rule, monitors and observers are prohibited from:
  - (a) In any way interfering with the processing of absentee ballots or conduct of the election;
  - (b) Using or bringing in to the room any photographic or other electronic monitoring or recording devices, cellular telephones, or computers;
  - (c) Engaging in any form of campaigning or campaign activity;
  - (d) Taking any action that endangers the secrecy and security of the ballots;

- (e) Touching any ballot or ballot container;
- (f) Tallying, tabulating, estimating, or attempting to tally, tabulate, or estimate, whether partial or otherwise, any of the votes on the absentee ballots cast; and
- (g) Communicating any information that they see, whether intentionally or inadvertently, about any ballot, vote, or selection to anyone other than to an election official who needs to such information to lawfully carry out his or her official duties.

(8) Before being allowed to view the process set forth in this rule, each designated monitor and observer shall execute an oath swearing or affirming, under penalty of perjury, that they understand the prohibitions set forth above, that they will not engage in any prohibited activity, and that they understand any violations of this rule will be punishable by the State Election Board.

(9) The county election superintendent shall publish a written notice, containing the dates, start and end times, and location(s) where absentee ballots will be processed and any rejected ballots will be adjudicated. Such notice shall be posted in the superintendent's office, on the home page of the county election website, and sent to the Secretary of State's office at least seven days prior to scanning ballots in accordance with this rule. The Secretary of State shall publish on his website the information he receives from counties stating the dates, times and locations where absentee ballots will be processed and adjudicated.

(10) Any person involved in processing absentee ballots according to this rule shall swear an oath, in the same form as the oath for poll officers set forth in O.C.G.A. § 21-2-95, prior to beginning the processing of absentee ballots.

(11) All cell phones, laptops, audio or video recording devices, and other communication devices shall be prohibited from the room where processing of absentee ballots is taking place, except for county election computers necessary to carry out this rule or otherwise conduct the election. No information concerning the tally of votes, or any partial tally of votes, shall be communicated until the time for the closing of the polls on Election day.

(12) The county superintendent shall be permitted to designate locations where public observers may view the process described in this rule to protect the security and secrecy of the ballots. Monitors designated by political parties, political bodies, and independent and non-partisan candidates shall be allowed to monitor the process described in this rule, but they must do so in a way that does not interfere with election officials. The superintendent may designate locations that allow designated monitors to monitor the process set forth in this rule, and such locations shall include areas that allow credentialed monitors to view the batching of the ballots, reconciliation of envelopes to ballots, scanning the ballots, duplication of ballots, adjudication of ballots by vote review panels, sealing the ballots after scanning, and other such areas as the superintendent may deem necessary to the assurance of fair and honest procedures in the carrying out of the procedures set forth in this rule.

Authority: O.C.G.A. § 21-2-31.