



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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April 7, 2022

Oregon Secretary of State
Elections Division
Public Service Building, Suite 501
255 Capitol St. NE
Salem, OR 97310
Elections.sos@sos.oregon.gov

RE: Urgent Request regarding processing of ballots

Dear Elections Division:

During recent special elections in Yamhill County, the first on January 18th and the second on March 22nd, we discovered an alarming rate of ballots being 'returned to sender'. While this occurrence can and has happened in past elections, the rate at which voters reported having their ballots mailed back to them after they had voted and placed the ballot in the mail was unusually high during the March 22nd election.

Yamhill County Clerk Brian Van Bergen responded immediately to try and pinpoint the problem. He discovered that the ballots were likely not being processed correctly at the Portland Post Office. His efforts included reaching out to the Western Region election mail specialist and determining that the best evidence suggests **postal workers likely had been feeding the ballots into the sorting machines backwards**. This created a situation where the system was scanning the voter's address rather than the county's address, and ballots were being mailed back to voting households.

Considering that we have a statewide primary election in just over a month, we are asking that the Secretary of State's Elections Office connect with the Western Region election mail specialist to ensure that ballots are being processed correctly. We were able to manage the return-to-sender ballots fairly well, but if this occurs on a statewide level, it could be a disaster.

We want to ensure the vote-by-mail system is working properly and that every ballot is processed in a timely manner. Having large quantities of ballots stuck in the mail system due to an avoidable, simple error could suppress voter participation and engagement.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Lindsay Berschauer
Chair

Casey Kulla
Vice-Chair

Mary Starrett
Commissioner

cc: Yamhill County Clerk Brian Van Bergen, vanbergenb@co.yamhill.or.us

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Board of Commissioners on
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