

**City of Madison**

# **Election Day Absentee Processing Manual**

**2026**



# Madison City Clerk's Office

## Contact Information

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<b>Address</b>	210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, Rm 105
<b>Clerk's Office Election Line</b>	608-266-4220
<b>Email</b>	madisonvotes@cityofmadison.com
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.cityofmadison.com/clerk/elections-voting/election-officials/resources">MyVote.wi.gov</a> <a href="https://www.cityofmadison.com/clerk/elections-voting/election-officials/resources">https://www.cityofmadison.com/clerk/elections-voting/election-officials/resources</a>

## Election Day Communications

The Chief Inspector at each polling place should have access to the Microsoft Teams channel for that election. The City Clerk's Office requests that election officials use Teams and the iPad provided in each Election Day supply tote for Election Day communications. For general comments, questions, and to report your 11am and 4pm vote counts, post to the main Teams channel feed (under "General"). For urgent supply, technology, or staffing issues, create a ticket in the Support Center (More>Apps>Support Center), being sure to label your ward number and the urgency of the task.

**Please note:** the first resort is always to use Teams to communicate on Election Day. This method is trackable and does not tie up the phone lines in the office. The Clerk's Office Election Line is the last resort, to be used if you are having technical issues and cannot access Teams.

### Office Hours

**Mon:** 8am-4:30pm

**Tue:** 8am-4:30pm

**Wed:** 8am-4:30pm,  
closed from 1pm-  
2pm

**Thur:** 8am-4:30pm

**Fri:** 8am-4:30pm

**Sat:** Closed

### Mission

*We exist to assist.* Our team serves to provide equitable access to open government by promoting the inclusion and full participation of all residents in the democratic process.

### Vision

For every eligible voter to be able to cast a ballot and have that ballot be counted.

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# Absentee Processing

## Important Reminders

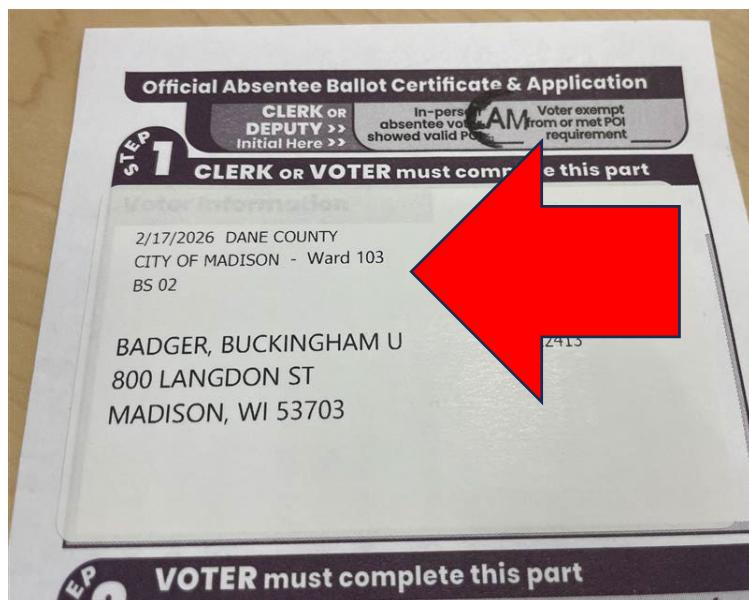
1. Wisconsin legislation dictates no absentee ballots may be processed before 7am on Election Day.
  - Absentee ballots must be processed in the same room where votes are cast.
2. Observers may observe the processing of absentee ballots but must maintain a minimum distance of 3 ft from election officials at all times.
  - Two election officials should be involved any time voted absentee ballots are being handled.
3. Absentee ballots will be securely sealed before delivery to the polling place for processing. Election Officials must log the seal numbers and the time that the seal is broken on the Inspectors' and Absentee Inspectors' Statements Diary of Events when opening the package of absentee ballots.

## Step-by-Step Guide to Absentee Processing

### 1. Sort the Absentee Envelopes

- a) **Check the ward number** to make sure the ballots are at the correct polling place. The label on the outside of each absentee certificate envelope lists the ward number. If a ballot was misdelivered to your polling place but lists a different ward, please immediately call the Clerk's Office at 608-266-4220 and set the ballots aside. DO NOT process the ballot. The Clerk's Office will send a Rapid Response Team member or a Roving Chief to pick up the ballot and deliver it to the correct polling place.

### 2.



- a) **Make sure the envelopes are sealed with no evidence of tampering** before opening the absentee envelope. If an envelope is not sealed or there is evidence of tampering, reject the absentee ballot. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.
  - i. *Some voters tape their envelope closed before placing them in the mail, which is not a reason for rejection.*
  - ii. *If an envelope is not completely sealed, determine whether someone could have tampered with the ballot. If you determine that the ballot has not been tampered with, you may process the ballot.*
4. **Check the absentee certificates for voter and witness signatures.** Each certificate must have the signature (or mark) of the voter and of the voter's witness. If either

of these signatures are missing, reject the absentee ballot. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.

- iii. *Signatures do not need to be legible in order for the ballot to be counted.*
- b) **Check certificates for printed witness name.** Each certificate must have the witness name printed under the witness signature. If the printed name is missing, reject the absentee ballot. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.
- c) **Check certificates for witness address.** Look at the envelope. Does it provide enough information so that the City Clerk could determine where to communicate with the witness? If so, the witness' address is complete.
  - i. *The name of a residence hall and room number instead of a street address is a complete address.*
  - ii. *The witness may have used a common abbreviation for their street name or city, such as Willy St, E Wash, or Mdsn. These are acceptable.*
  - iii. *A zip code could be listed instead of the name of a city.*
  - iv. *"Same address as above" or "same address as voter" is a complete address.*
  - v. *An arrow between the witness address line and the voter's address is a complete address.*
  - vi. **If there is no witness address, reject the absentee ballot. Do not assign a voter slip number. Do not open the envelope. Set aside for rejection.**
- d) **Check the voter's name against the ineligible voters list.** Alert the Chief Inspector if an absentee voter is on the ineligible list for your ward.

5. You can find the ineligible voter list in the black "Absentee Processing" binder.

3. **Check absentees into the poll book.**

- a) **Process at least three absentee certificates at a time** to ensure that the ballots are anonymous. Stand in line to check the absentee voters in the poll book.
- b) **Announce each absentee voter's name and address at the poll book.** Observers must be able to hear the names and addresses.
  - i. If the absentee voter is not in the poll book, check the supplemental poll book (there may be two supplemental lists at the back of the poll book—be sure to check both). The voter had to be registered for the

Clerk's Office to generate the absentee label. If a voter's name is not in the poll book or the supplementals, call the Clerk's Office at 608-266-4220.

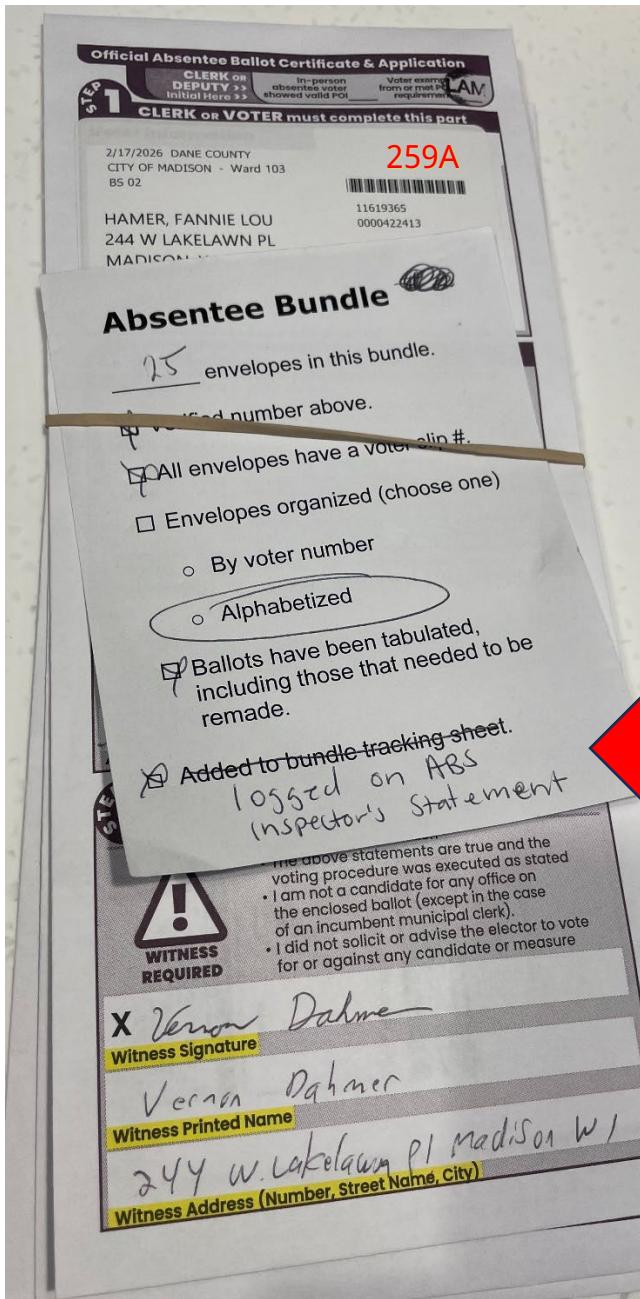
**c) Assign each absentee ballot the next sequential voter slip number for the ward.**

- i. Write the voter number in the poll book followed by an "A" for absentee. (An example would be voter number 168A.)
- ii. You should also write the voter slip number on each absentee certificate envelope as it is assigned. This helps with reconciliation if numbers do not balance at the end of election night.

**4. Open the certificate envelopes.**

- a) **One at a time, carefully open each certificate envelope.** If the ballot is torn, set it aside to remake.
- b) **Remove the ballot from the certificate envelope.** Protect the secrecy of the ballot. DO NOT mark the ballot in any way. Once the ballot is out of the envelope, there should be no way to identify which voter cast that ballot.
  - i. If the envelope contains more than one marked ballot, both ballots must be rejected. Using tape, reseal ballots in the certificate envelope. Set aside the certificate envelope for rejection.
    - Write on the Absentee Diary of Events that you have issued one more voter slip number than ballots counted.
    - This is **crucial** to ensure your count is correct at the end.
  - ii. In the envelope contains a marked ballot and a blank ballot, process the marked ballot. Seal the unmarked ballot in the certificate envelope.

**6. Put the empty certificate envelopes in the large white bin with the "Used Absentee Certificates" envelope. At the end of the night, at least 3 election officials will need to sign the "Used Absentee Certificates" envelope. The empty envelopes should be in alphabetical order and rubber banded by the end of the night.**



Bundle the empty, processed absentee certificate envelopes in groups of 25+.

Sequentially log all completed bundles on the **Absentee Inspectors' Statement** events page as they're processed.

All empty, processed bundles will go into the clear absentee bin with the signed Used Absentee Certificate to be returned to the Clerk's Office at the end of the night.

## 5. Unfold, flatten, and examine the ballots.

- Completely remove the absentee ballots from their envelopes. You should not be able to associate a voter name or number with any singular ballot. Unfold at least three ballots at a time to protect the secrecy of each voter's ballot.
- Flatten the ballots as much as possible.
- Check the ballots for initials. Check for Clerk's initials under the "Absentee Elector's Ballot Issued By" section. If initials are missing, make a note in the

absentee diary of events. Remember, the ballots are secret and not associated with any voter name or number. The note should simply say something like, "Absentee ballot missing Clerk initials. Processed ballot" and list the time of processing. **Never write the voter name or the voter slip number when recording this type of incident in the Absentee Diary of Events.**

- d) **Watch for creatively marked ballots.** If the voter circled, underlined, crossed out, or erased marks on the ballot, set it aside to remake. You should not know the name of the voter or the slip number for the ballot.
- e) **Watch for over-voted ballots.** If the voter selected too many candidates for one office, set the ballot aside to remake. You should not know the name of the voter or the voter slip number for that ballot.

7. **Insert the absentee ballots into the tabulator.** If an absentee voter did not select any candidates, the tabulator will alert you that the ballot is blank. If the ballot really is blank, use the touchscreen to verify that you want to "cast a blank ballot." Document this on the incident log. If the tabulator kicks out a ballot for another reason, set the ballot aside to remake. **Absentee ballots should not be rejected once they are out of the envelope. We only reject certificate envelopes.**

8. **Reconcile absentee numbers throughout the day.** Chief Inspectors have access to absentees issued and returned totals in their Teams channel when the polls open and data are updated close to polls closing. The AM absentee courier delivery container also includes the most up to date absentee log with **all recorded issued and returned absentees** as of the night before the election. You must reconcile the number of absentees processed at the polling places during Election Day against the returned absentee numbers.

Voters at the polling place may jump to the conclusion that you are personally casting three ballots. For transparency, wear a name badge or sticker (placed on your back) indicating that you are processing absentee ballots.

## Step-by-Step Guide to Remaking Ballots

When examining the absentee ballots to be fed into the tabulator (see step 5 above), you may identify ballots that were marked incorrectly by the voter. Rather than filling in the bubbles to mark their vote, voters may have circled, underlined, crossed out, or erased marks on their ballot. These ballots will likely be kicked back by the tabulator or result in over or under votes and therefore need to be remade before being fed into the tabulator to be cast.

Review and follow these steps when remaking ballots:

- 1. Get a ballot buddy.**
  - a. For the sake of transparency, always work with another official.
  - b. Invite observers to watch the process.
- 2. Get ballot and Good Ballot/Bad Ballot stickers from ballot table.**
  - a. Bring the ballot that needs to be remade to the ballot table.
  - b. If you will be using the ExpressVote to remake the ballot, **do not** put the Good Ballot sticker on the ballot card until after the ballot card is printed.
- 3. Assign sequential numbers to ballots that need to be remade.**
  - a. The first ballot to be remade is Original Ballot #1. It gets a Bad Ballot #1 sticker. The corresponding remade ballot is Duplicate Ballot #1. It gets a Good Ballot #1 sticker. At a recount, these ballots will be compared side by side.
- 4. Complete “For Official Use Only” box on bottom of the ballot.**
  - a. Write the reason for remaking the ballot.
  - b. Assign the same number to both the original and the duplicated ballot.
  - c. Both officials remaking the ballot should initial the official use only box.

For Official Use Only	
<i>Inspectors: Identify ballots required to be remade.</i>	
<b>Reason for remaking ballot:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Overvoted	
<input type="checkbox"/> Damaged	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other	
Original Ballot No. or Duplicate Ballot No.	
1	1
LV	SW
Initials of inspectors who remake ballot	

- 5. Use the Bad Ballot, Good Ballot labels.**
  - a. On good ballot label, answer whether ballot was an absentee.
  - b. Put labels near official use section of ballot. Do not cover any ovals or coding. The bad ballot label goes on the ballot marked by the voter. The good ballot label goes on the remade ballot you will feed through the tabulator.

## Absentee Processing | Step-by-Step Guide to Remaking Ballots

 <b>Bad Ballot # 1</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 6</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 11</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____
 <b>Good Ballot # 1</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 6</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 11</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____
 <b>Bad Ballot # 2</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 7</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 12</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____
 <b>Good Ballot # 2</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 7</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 12</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____
 <b>Bad Ballot # 3</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 8</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 13</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____
 <b>Good Ballot # 3</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 8</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 13</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____
 <b>Bad Ballot # 4</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 9</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 14</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____
 <b>Good Ballot # 4</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 9</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 14</b> Remade ballot Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____
 <b>Bad Ballot # 5</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 10</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____	 <b>Bad Ballot # 15</b> Original ballot that has been duplicated Initials: _____
 <b>Good Ballot # 5</b> Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 10</b> Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____	 <b>Good Ballot # 15</b> Absentee? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Initials: _____

9.

<p>Ballot issued by <i>LV</i> (initials of inspectors)</p> <p>Absentee ballot issued by (initials of municipal clerk or deputy clerk) (If issued by SVDs, both SVDs must initial.)</p> <p>Certification of Voter Assistance I certify that I marked this ballot at the request and direction of a voter, who is authorized under the law to receive assistance.</p> <p>(signature of assistor)</p> <p><b>For Official Use Only</b></p> <p>Inspectors: Identify ballots required to be remade.</p> <p>Reason for remaking ballot:  <input type="checkbox"/> Overvoted  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Damaged  <input type="checkbox"/> Other         </p> <p>Original Ballot No. or Duplicate Ballot No. <i>#2</i></p> <p>Ballot begins on other side </p>		<p>Ballot issued by <i>GJP</i> (initials of inspectors)</p> <p>Absentee ballot issued by (initials of municipal clerk or deputy clerk) (If issued by SVDs, both SVDs must initial.)</p> <p>Certification of Voter Assistance I certify that I marked this ballot at the request and direction of a voter, who is authorized under the law to receive assistance.</p> <p>(signature of assistor)</p> <p><b>For Official Use Only</b></p> <p>Inspectors: Identify ballots required to be remade.</p> <p>Reason for remaking ballot:  <input type="checkbox"/> Overvoted  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Damaged  <input type="checkbox"/> Other         </p> <p>Original Ballot No. or Duplicate Ballot No. <i>#2</i></p> <p>Ballot begins on other side </p>
<p>Page 2 of 2-sided ballot</p>		

**6. Determine voter intent.**

- a. Mark the remade ballot to reflect voter intent, except for over-voted offices.
- b. **Over-votes:** if the voter selected too many candidates for an office, try to figure out voter intent. If it isn't clear that the voter intended to vote for one candidate, leave that office blank on the remade ballot.

**7. Document on incident log.**

- a. Write down why you are remaking ballots.
- b. Note whether you could determine voter intent.
- c. Remember, these are secret ballots.
  - i. We shouldn't know whose ballots are being remade.
  - ii. We shouldn't know the voter number for a ballot we are remaking.
  - iii. When we take the ballot out of the envelope, we completely separate the ballot and the envelope.
- d. Both officials remaking the ballot should initial the incident log.

**8. Preserve ballot marked by voter as evidence.**

- a. Fold the ballot marked by the voter. Put it in the large Original Ballots that have been Duplicated envelope. You will seal this envelope in the ballot bag at the end of the night.

**9. Feed remade ballot into the tabulator.**

- a. Feed the remade ballot into the tabulator to be counted.

**Voter Intent Objections** – If a poll worker objects to a voter intent determination, note that on the incident log. Only a poll worker can object. Process the remade ballot. Note the objection on the remade ballot. Number objections sequentially, beginning with “Objection #1.”

## Hand-Delivered Absentee Guide

Before accepting the absentee ballot from the voter:

1. Ask **"Are you the voter?"**

If the answer is **"Yes,"** visually **verify** the following:

- ✓ Ward number is correct for the polling place
- ✓ Voter signature is present
- ✓ Witness signature is present
- ✓ Witness printed name is present
- ✓ Witness address is present and sufficient for Clerk to reasonably contact the voter
- ✓ Envelope is securely sealed with no evidence of tampering

a. **DO NOT HANDLE** a hand-delivered absentee until **after verifying certification!** If we accept an incomplete certificate, the absentee ballot will be rejected. If the certificate is incomplete, the voter must return to the polls with their witness to complete certification, or vote in-person instead of returning an absentee ballot.

2. If the voter responds **"No"** to the question, "Are you the voter," ask:

a. **"Are you delivering the voter's ballot because the voter has determined they require assistance returning their ballot due to disability?"**

- i. If the answer is **"No,"** **do not accept the absentee ballot.**
- ii. If the answer is **"Yes,"** ask: **"Are you someone other than the voter's employer, an agent of that employer, or an officer or agent of the voter's union?"**
  - 1. If the answer is **"No,"** **do not accept the absentee ballot.**
  - 2. If the answer is **"Yes,"** **visually verify** that all required elements are correct on the certificate envelope and **accept the ballot.**

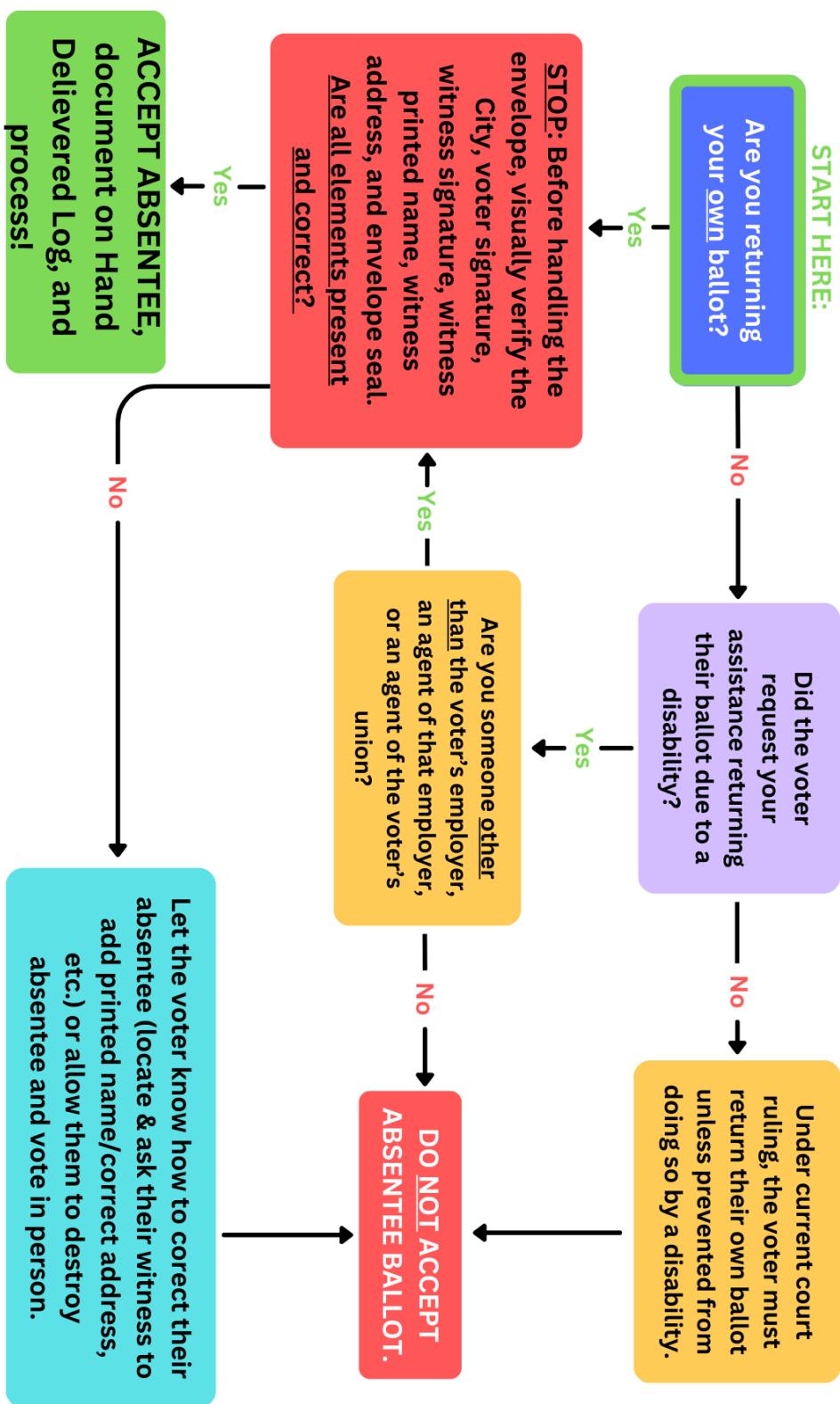
After accepting a hand-delivered ballot:

1. Record the **voter name** and **voter number** on the Hand-Delivered Absentee Log. Ideally, this should be done in front of the voter. *The Clerk's Office must manually update each voter's record for hand-delivered absentee ballots. The information on this sheet helps them do that more efficiently.*
2. **Accept** the absentee ballot envelope and thank the voter.

3. use a highlighter (provided in the supply tote) to mark the certificate envelope as hand-delivered.
4. Once it is processed, put the hand-delivered absentee envelope into the provide **clear plastic folder**.
5. Review the flowchart on the next page for a visualization/decision tree outlining when to accept a hand-delivered ballot:

# Voter is here to DROP OFF A BALLOT:

State law requires that you ask the following questions when a voter comes to the polling place to return an absentee.



# Appendix

## Notes