



*Commonwealth of Virginia*  
**Fairfax County**

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# **Central Absentee Precinct (CAP) Absentee Ballot**

## **Pre-processing Phase I Ballot Extraction Operation Manual**

**November 5, 2024**  
**General and Special Elections**

*A publication of Fairfax County, Virginia*

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Issued by the  
**Fairfax County Office of Elections**  
12000 Government Center Pkwy, Suite 323  
Fairfax, Virginia 22035

**Election Support:** 703-324-4735, TTY 711  
**Voter Registration:** 703-222-0776  
**Website:** [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections)  
**Email:** [voting@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:voting@fairfaxcounty.gov)



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## Fairfax County Office of Elections Contact Information

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- **Office of Elections, General Election Information:**  
Phone: 703-222-0776  
Email: [voting@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:voting@fairfaxcounty.gov)  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections)
- **Absentee (AB), Absentee Voting Information:**
  - Phone: 703-324-4969
  - Email: [absenteevoting@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:absenteevoting@fairfaxcounty.gov)
  - [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/absentee-voting-mail](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/absentee-voting-mail)
- **Office of Elections, Election Officer Information**
  - Phone: 703-324-4735
  - Email: [elect@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:elect@fairfaxcounty.gov)
- **Central Absentee Precinct (CAP):**
  - Phone: 703-324-4711
  - Email: [CAPStaff@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:CAPStaff@fairfaxcounty.gov)
- **CAP - Mailer Receipt**
  - Phone: 703- 324- 5101
- **CAP - Mailer Check-in**
  - Phone: 703 –324-5208
- **CAP - Extraction Operation**
  - Phone: 703-324-5126
- **CAP – Scanning Operation**
  - Phone: 703 -324-5126

## Personal Contact Information

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It is important that you keep your name, address, home phone number, cell phone number and email address current with the Office of Elections.

If you have an unlisted number, please advise the Office of Elections.

## Qualifications

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1. Able to take direction, pay attention to detail, and remain focused on the task
2. *Physically and mentally able to work a 6 to 8-hour day, and longer if working a second consecutive shift.*
3. Able to sit and/or stand for an extended period.
4. Able to speak, read and write the English language.
5. Must be a registered voter in the state of Virginia.

While serving as an extraction operation staffer, you must not comment on candidates or political issues, current or general, among your fellow officers. Engagement in any form of electioneering while in the Central Absentee Precinct is prohibited.

You may not be a member of the extraction operation staff if you:

1. Hold elected office.
2. Are an employee of an elected official.

## Training

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Prior to serving, extraction operation staff must complete Fairfax County mandatory training and review extraction operation procedures and protocols.

## Election Oath

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All extraction operation staff will be sworn in for the current election prior to working.

## Work Calendar and Duty Hours

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The extraction operation schedule is based on the volume of mailed-in and drop box voter submissions. Staff will be advised of the overall schedule in advance of the start of extraction operations when the Office of Elections understands the anticipated volume of voter submissions. Staff schedules will fluctuate throughout the election season based on the volume. It is anticipated that the greatest need

for extraction operation staff will begin on or about Monday, October 14, and operations will continue daily as needed through Tuesday, November 12.

Staff may be required to visit the Office of Elections prior to the start of operations to obtain county credentials and set up FOCUS (the Fairfax County Unified System) usernames/passwords.

Staff members are scheduled to work six hours per day, generally from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM. Depending on the volume of mailers, staff may be required to work up to 8 hours per day. A 30-minute unpaid lunch is standard for staff members working longer than 6 hours per day.

## Absence

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If you agree to serve as an extraction operation staff member and cannot do so because of an emergency, notify the Office of Elections **immediately** so we can attempt to fill the vacancy and operations are not impeded. Call **703-324-5126** and/or email **your supervisor directly**.

## ID Badge

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You must always wear your Fairfax County employee ID badge while on the job.

## Location

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Extraction operation take place in the Fairfax County Government Center. Specific room assignments will be communicated prior to the start of operations.

## Compensation and Status

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Extraction Operation staff are non-merit, G-Status (temporary) employees of Fairfax County. These are hourly wage positions, paid at the S-9 rate, and do not include Fairfax County benefits such as sick and annual leave, insurance or retirement programs.

Staff may not work more than 900 hours per calendar year. The duration of employment is contingent upon department operational needs, budgetary constraints, and performance. A decision to terminate employment is not appealable and does not have to be “for cause.”

Recording Your Working Time

Fairfax County pay periods consist of two consecutive weeks, beginning on a Saturday and ending on a Friday. For each two-week pay period, you will record your time worked on a payroll time sheet **and** in the Employee Self-Service Portal in FOCUS, an online reporting system.



Figure 1 – FOCUS Access Page

Complete the payroll time sheet correctly.

- Include your Employee Identification Number (EIN).
- Using standard time, record your working time **rounded to the nearest full or half hour.**
- If your daily hours worked is greater than six, then subtract ½ hour from the total hours worked **to account for the required 30-minute unpaid lunch (not applicable to Election Day, Sat/Sun prior and after Election Day).**
- **You must include the assigned election code when entering your time in FOCUS 4G15-000-015**

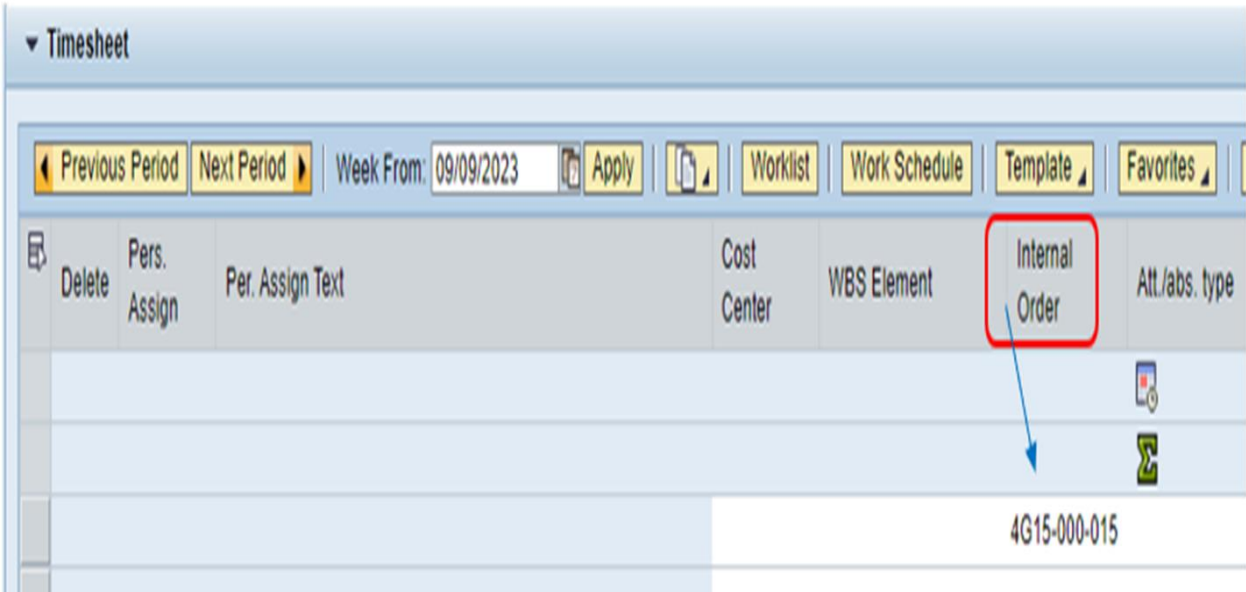


Fig. 2 Timesheet FOCUS

- **Sign** and date the payroll sheet at the end of the two week pay period.

**Ensure that the information on the payroll timesheet matches the information recorded in FOCUS. “Time In” and “Time Out” (on the Timesheet) entries must equal the number of hours worked notated on your Timesheet and entered in FOCUS**

Pay is directly deposited to your bank account, but the first check may take more than two weeks after the end of the pay period to appear.

## **Federal and State Income Tax**

Extraction Operation staff wages are subject to federal and state income tax.

## **General Guidelines for Extraction Operation Staff**

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As a member of the extraction operation staff, you must perform all duties assigned to you by the Office of Elections, and do so faithfully, diligently, securely and impartially while upholding the highest possible standard.

1. Work to:
  - a. Maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the voting process.
  - b. Ensure that the workroom is secure.
  - c. Comply with the policies and procedures detailed in this manual and any instructions provided by the Office of Elections.
2. Collaborate with fellow staff to conduct all election operations efficiently and accurately.
3. Refrain from cell phone use in the workroom, cell phones should be removed from the table and placed out of sight. Cell phone use for recording or taking photos/videos is strictly prohibited in the workroom. Cell phones may be used during breaks and away from the work area.
4. Do not engage with any authorized representatives or observers. Refer questions from the media and authorized representatives to the Extraction Operation supervisor or Election Office Staff
5. Do not, at any time, under any circumstances, discuss or reveal any voter submissions, ballots, votes, or trends that you may observe during operations. Likewise, voter information must remain confidential.
6. Arrive on time, work at your assigned duty area, and remain through the end of your shift. Always wear your county-issued ID badge.
7. Refrain from commenting on candidates or political issues, current or general, with fellow staff members, authorized representatives or with voters, and never engage in any other forms of electioneering while in the workroom.

8. Dress comfortably, but neatly, in business casual attire. Dress in layers, as the workroom temperature can vary. Ripped jeans, sweatpants, and very casual clothing are not appropriate.
9. Never wear politically oriented items, such as campaign t-shirts, buttons, stickers, jewelry, etc.
10. Food and beverages are not permitted around mailers, ballots and machinery.
11. Bring water, coffee, snacks etc. The cafeteria, located on the lower level of the Government Center, is open from 7:00 am -2:00 pm and offers a limited menu. Smoking is not allowed inside the building.





## **Safety, Security Awareness & Details**

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### **Information included in this section:**

- Emergencies
- Emergency Situations Requiring Evacuations
- Equipment & Facility Security
- Integrity of the Election Process

Emergencies

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Government Center Security:	703-324-3434
Emergency: Police-Fire-Rescue:	911
From a Government Center landline:	9 – 911

If you call 911 (or a non-emergency number), be prepared to:

- 1. State the nature of the emergency or problem, e.g., medical emergency, traffic accident, fire, disturbance.
- 2. State your name and identify yourself as an election officer.
- 3. State the building name and address: **Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway.**
- 4. **Give a contact phone number**, preferably your cellphone.  
Cell callback number: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Notify security personnel on duty.
- 6. Notify building security. 703-324-3434.
- 7. Call the Office of Elections **703-324-4735** to report the problem/incident.
- 8. Send an election officer outside to **meet the emergency personnel**.

Emergency Situations Requiring Evacuation

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**Fire – Fire drill – Bomb threat – Flooding – Earthquake**

Be prepared – familiarize yourself with these procedures!

- 1. Locate and study the **posted evacuation route** in your room and building.
- 2. Make sure you know the **location of exits**.
- 3. Review evacuation **meeting place**.

## Emergency Evacuation Plan

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1. Staff directs authorized representatives and any observers to nearest exits.
2. If prudent, based on the level of the emergency, secure mailers in an orderly manner.
3. Team leader ensures everyone has exited the room, then closes and, if possible, locks doors to the room.
4. Team leader designates a staff member to notify the Office of Elections that an emergency exists, if the emergency arose in CAP.

**Remember:** Remain calm and follow the directions of public safety officials.

If the building cannot be re-entered, the Office of Elections will provide further instructions.

## Emergency Situations - Shelter-in-Place

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**Be prepared – familiarize yourself with these procedures.**

Shelter-in-place is a protective action to shield people from a hazardous outdoor situation or external threat, such as a weather event or active shooter situation. This is intended as a short-term measure to protect staff until the hazard has passed.

1. **Your shelter-in-place location is determined based on your room assignment.**
2. Keep in mind that there may be little or no lighting if the power is out.
3. Team leader directs authorized representatives and all team members to the shelter-in-place. Team leader closes and, if possible, locks the room doors and closes shades.
4. Remember to keep out of common view, away from doors and windows, remain quiet and place cell phones on mute.
5. Use extreme caution, not allowing anyone entry into the room until a public safety or security official comes to the room with directions.
6. Team leader designates a staff member to notify the Office of Elections that an emergency exists if it originated in the workroom area.
7. Remain in the shelter until the emergency has passed and follow instructions from security and emergency personnel.

**Remember:** Remain calm and follow the directions of public safety officials.

**Be prepared:** Items to take to the shelter: personal health items such as medicine, etc., flashlight, cellphone, radio, bottled water, drinks and snack food.

## Equipment & Facility Security

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It is critically important that you follow security rules and policies related to the equipment and facility.

1. Look for any potential tampering or defacement of mailers, computers, or security cases and report any such activities immediately to office staff.
2. Never leave your computer unattended. Always log out (control/alt/delete) before stepping away from your computer.
3. Protect equipment from food and liquids.
4. Report unauthorized and unidentified people inside the extraction operation room.

## Integrity of the Election Process

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As a member of the extraction operation staff, you are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the election process by:

1. Carefully following the established procedures for extracting return mailers.
2. Keeping the processing tables free of food, drinks, personal bags, and personal electronic equipment.
3. Ensuring that return mailers are safeguarded in the workroom. Mailers should not be left unattended.
4. Ensuring that only authorized people are present in the extraction operation area.
5. Protecting voters' personally identifiable information on mailers.



## People & Activities in the Extraction Operation Room

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### Information included in this section:

- People Allowed in the Extraction Operation Room
- News Media in the Extraction Operation Room
- Authorized Representatives and Observers

## People Allowed in the Extraction Operation Room

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The supervisor should be able to identify the people allowed in the extraction operation room. Such people may include:

1. Party or candidate representatives with written authorization.
2. Neutral observers with prior written authorization from the Electoral Board.
3. Other authorized representatives or observers with verifying documentation.
4. Electoral Board members.
5. Fairfax County registrars.
6. Office of Elections staff.
7. News media with authorization and accompanied by a staff member.

**Everyone authorized to be present in the extraction operation room must wear an ID badge or an authorized representative/observer tag.**

## News Media in the Extraction Operation Room

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News media may enter the extraction operation room and film or photograph as long as they do not film or photograph a completed mailer, or film or photograph any voter personally identifiable information.

Interviews, live broadcasts, or taping of a reporter's remarks are prohibited within the extraction operation room.

The supervisor must call the Office of Elections if news media attempt to enter the extraction operation room unaccompanied by county staff.

## Authorized Representatives and Observers

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Virginia law permits properly designated individuals to serve as authorized representatives and observers.

### Authorized Representatives and Observers:

- Must provide a letter of authorization, signed by the party chairman or independent candidate, to the extraction Operation supervisor upon arrival. Must complete the official log with the times of arrival/departure.
- Must wear an authorized representative/observer tag and vest.
- Must be a qualified voter in Virginia.
- May stay all day or come and go in shifts.
- May not be a candidate.
- May not engage in any electioneering within the extraction workroom.
- May not hinder or delay any staff. May observe but not interfere with the orderly conduct of the extraction operation.
- May not act in a noisy manner to disturb the process of the election.
- Should address questions to the supervisor. May not question, converse with, or engage in any way with staff.
- Have the right to observe the extraction operation and may immediately appeal to the electoral board if they are dissatisfied with the supervisor's decision regarding physical positioning within the room.
- May not be able to see the voter personally identifiable information on a mailer.
- May mark or make their own lists of those who have voted and make their own notes. An election staff member may not provide any lists nor look up a voter's record at the request of an authorized representative or observer.
- May use handheld wireless communication devices inside the workroom provided they do not disrupt the operation. The supervisor may prohibit the use of the devices if their use is hindering operations.
- May not photograph or video while inside the workroom (except credentialed news media).
- May not touch or handle any official voter submission documents

## Background – Office of Elections/Absentee Ballot Division

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The Fairfax County Office of Elections is committed to providing each citizen of Fairfax County with the opportunity to exercise their right to vote in an efficient and equitable manner. This effort is accomplished in accordance with the Constitutions of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as the Code of Virginia.

It is the responsibility of the Office of Elections to ensure each election is run fairly and openly. Virginia state law requires all Election Office employees to execute their duties to the best of their abilities and that they studiously endeavor to prevent fraud, deceit, and abuse when conducting elections.

The Absentee Ballot division within the Office of Elections, is responsible for executing and managing those actions required to mail out, receive, and account for absentee ballots sent to registered voters in Fairfax County. Absentee ballots are sent only to voters who have requested, in writing, to vote absentee.

There are several processes involved to accurately and efficiently; receive, sort, count, and record receipt of the voter's ballot into the statewide voter database.





**These manual details the actions necessary to open and extract absentee ballots returned to the Office of Elections (Pre-processing, Phase 1).**

## **Absentee Ballot Process Overview**

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If a voter wishes to vote absentee, their first step is to submit an absentee ballot application to the Fairfax County Office of Elections. The application must be mailed, emailed, or submitted through the Department of Elections online portal. An absentee ballot cannot be requested via telephone. When the voter's request is approved, an absentee ballot is sent to the requester within three business days once ballots have been printed. After the voter receives and votes their ballot, they return it to the Office of Elections inside a sealed return mailer by the various methods listed below:

1. United States Postal Service (USPS)
2. Commercial mail delivery system (FedEx, DHL, UPS, etc.)
3. Placed in a drop box at early voting locations during operating hours
4. In the 24/7 drop box located outside at the Fairfax County Government Center
5. On election day, placed in a drop box at a polling place
6. Hand delivered to the Fairfax County Office of Elections, suite 323

When the return mailer is received in the office, it is sorted by category (domestic/UOCAVA digital, UOCAVA email, drop box), stamped with the date it was received in the office, counted by category, and placed in designated mail trays. Each tray of sorted return mailers creates a "bundle" which is organized and tracked by the date the mailer is received in the Office of Elections. Once categorized and trayed, the return mailers are ready for the check-in operation.

During the return mailer check-in operation, the voter's ballot status, as reflected in VERIS, the statewide voter database system, transitions from "issued" (absentee ballot sent to voter), to "pre-processed" (absentee ballot returned, Statement of Absentee Voter completed with required signatures). Once the Mail Check-in process has been completed, the return mailers cycle forward to Extraction team leads who ready them for Pre-Processing, Phase 1, Opening and Extraction.

The first step in preparing the return mailers for Phase 1 is to create "batches". Batching is the process of combining trays of same category (domestic/UOCAVA digital, Dropbox, UOCAVA email), bundled returned mailers into larger sets of mailers ranging up to 800 in number. Once batched, the return mailers are placed in yellow mail trays which indicates they are ready for the opening of each return mailer and removal of its enclosed ballot (Pre-Processing Phase 1). Pre-processing Phase II is the scanning of the returned absentee ballots using the DS 850.

All return mailers are kept in secure storage throughout each phase of absentee ballot processing (receipt, check-in, opening/extraction, scanning).

## Pre-processing Phase 1 – Opening and Extraction

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This first phase of pre-processing is a two-step function. Step one is the physical opening of each return mailer with step two being removal of its enclosed folded ballot.

### Step One - Opening return mailers:

1. At the start of each workday, two Elections Office staff transport trays of batched return mailers from secure storage to the workroom.
2. The staff members use the automated envelope opener machine to open each return mailers. Care is taken to ensure the enclosed ballot is not damaged.
3. Only return mailers that can be processed (ballot removed/extracted) by the end of the workday are opened.
4. After opening, the trays of now opened return mailers are placed in storage racks, awaiting step two, ballot extraction.

### Step Two - Extracting ballots from return mailers:

1. Each extraction team consists of two to four people. Each team has a designated team leader. The table team leader is responsible for the proper execution of the team's duties which include:
  - a. Proper removal of the folded ballot from its return mailer
  - b. Maintaining security and secrecy of each ballot
  - c. Always maintaining the privacy and security of sensitive information.
  - d. Ensuring accurate counts of ballots and return mailers.
  - e. Coordinating resolution of potential issues with Extraction Operation Supervisor
  - f. Accurately completing the Ballot Batch Tracking Log
2. When ready, the Extraction Operation Supervisor brings one batch of opened return mailers to each table for processing. A batch averages 1-2 trays and contains approximately 700-900 return mailers with ballots enclosed.
3. From the batch trays, each team member takes a handful of mailers and puts them in front of their seat (the side of the return mailer with the voter's information must be always facing down). Taking one mailer at a time, the folded ballot is removed from its return mailer and placed into the plastic box in front of their seat marked "ballots" and the empty return mailer placed in the plastic box marked "empty mailers". All extraction work is conducted on the tabletop. Return mailers and ballots must always be visible.
4. Team members place any visibly damaged ballots (torn/missing corners, damaged timing marks, etc.) into the tray designated for non-scannable/damaged ballots (DNS). Still place its associated mailer into the plastic box for empty return mailers. Ballots that cannot be digitally read by the DS850 will be hand-counted.

5. Periodically, a team member finds a return mailer in which the contents are not as they should be such as no ballot/empty mailer, two or more ballots in one mailer, only contains election information materials but no ballot, etc. This is known as a “faulty mailer”. When this occurs, the team leader notifies the Extraction Operation Supervisor who removes it from the batch and directs the team leader to adjust the batch count. The Operation Supervisor then forwards the faulty mailer to the Curing team for processing.
6. When the batch trays on the table are empty, each team member counts their stacks of folded ballots and empty return mailers. Ballots and empty mailers are counted separately, in groups of ten, crisscrossing each group of ten to create stacks of 50. During the counting, ballots are kept folded. The first count of mailers and ballots is then verified by a second person at the table. Team members physically switch to another seat at the table and count the stacks of ballots and return mailers in front of that seat. The first person’s count must match the second person’s count. If the counts do not match, the stacks are recounted until they do match. **Counts must match before moving forward!**
7. Once counts of the ballots and empty return mailers match, the table team leader completes the ballot batch tracking log.
8. The next step is to take the stacks of 50 mailers created during the counting process, rubber band them, and place the bundles back into the yellow trays.
9. After all mailers have been put in the trays, the next step is for each team member to unfold their ballots (maintaining the stacks of 50 ballots). The unfolded ballots are placed on the table with the front of the ballot (side showing the office races) facing down and oriented in the same direction. **Note:** the folded ballot may have a paper tab across the top of the page. This is a left over from the printing process. When unfolding the ballot, check for any paper tabs and remove them. If the tab is left on the ballot, it could damage the DS 850 scanner.
10. With the ballots unfolded, flattened, and faced in the same direction, it’s time to put the ballot stacks into the batch box at the table. When putting the ballots into the batch box, insert a colored piece of paper in between each stack. This separation between stacks helps the scan team.
11. Once all scannable (undamaged) ballots have been put in the batch box, the table team leader places the completed ballot batch tracking log on top of them. Finally, the non-scannable (damaged- DNS) ballots are placed on top of the log. With all materials now in the batch box, the order should be:
  - a. scannable ballots (bottom – face down)
  - b. completed ballot batch tracking log (center)
  - c. non-scannable/damaged ballots (top – face down)
12. When all table actions have been completed (return mailers in yellow trays, unfolded ballots, and log in the batch box), the table team leader notifies the Extraction Operation Supervisor that the batch is ready for review by the Quality Assurance (QA) team.

13. The QA team is made up of two Elections Office staff. The team takes the trays of bundled return mailers and boxed unfolded ballots to their work area. The QA team will:

- a. place bundled return mailers into a #5 box (contains only empty return mailers).
- b. remove a batch number label from one of the yellow mail trays and place it on the side of the #5 box.
- c. verify all paper tabs are removed from the unfolded ballots, that the ballots are faced down and properly nested, and that the tracking log is completed.
- d. remove the batch number label from the second yellow tray and place it on the side of the #3 batch box.
- e. place two pre-numbered batch labels inside the batch box. These labels are used by the scan team.
- f. seal the batch box with black security tape.
- g. **SIGN** diagonally across the black security tape.

The sealed batch box is now ready for Pre-processing, Phase II – Scanning and is transported to a secure location for overnight storage.

### **E-mail ballot extraction from return mailers:**

Email ballots are received from overseas voters in variously sized return mailers. Due to this fact, these mailers must be opened manually using a letter opener. They are separated and accounted for in the same manner as Domestic/UOCAVA digital return mailers with some exceptions:

1. Once the email ballot is removed from its return mailer, the ballot is unfolded and kept in sequential order, always safeguarding the ballot. (Office races facing down)
2. The email ballots go in a security case and stored inside a secure room while always maintaining dual control, until they are transferred to the hand-count tally team post-election day.
3. The empty mailer is placed in a #5 box that is marked with the date range of the mailers contained inside.

## Addendum #1 Domestic Return Mailer

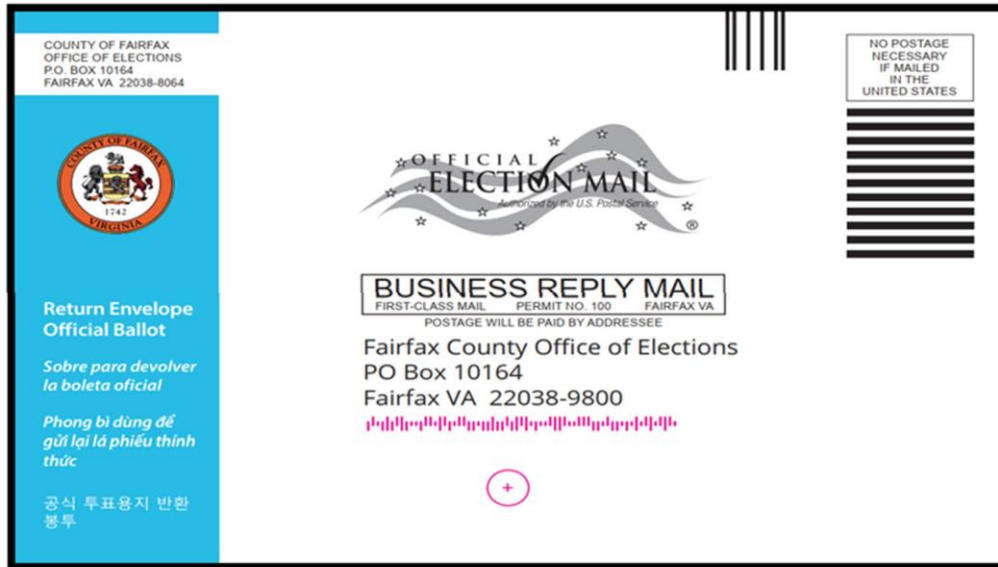


Figure 1 - Domestic Return Mailer Front Side

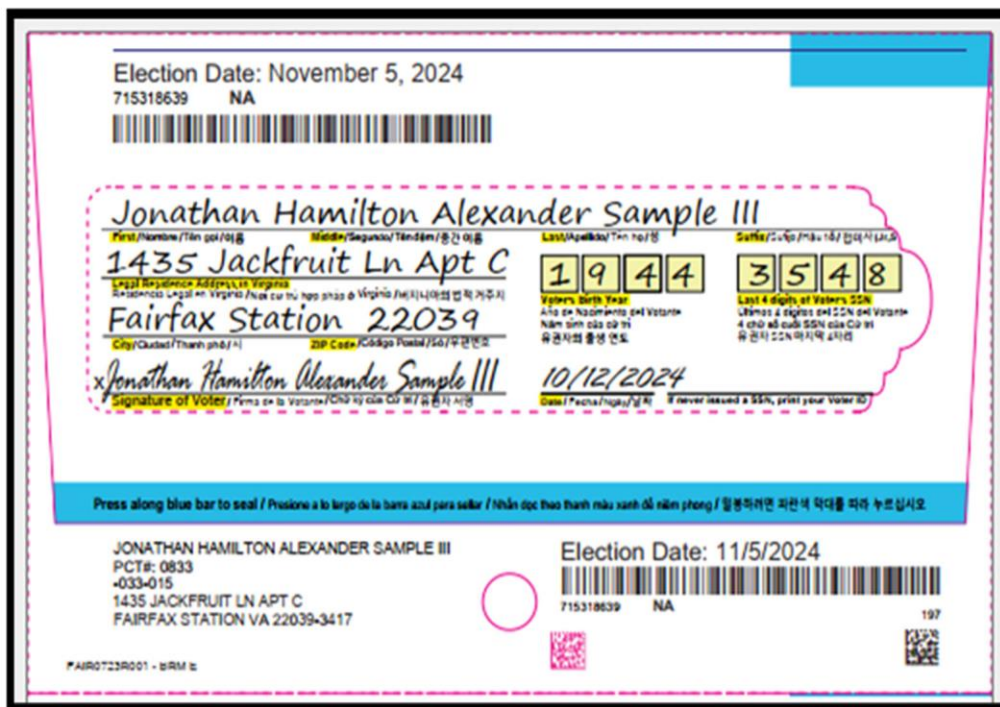


Figure 2 -Domestic Return Mailer - Reverse Side

## Addendum #2 Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) Return Mailer

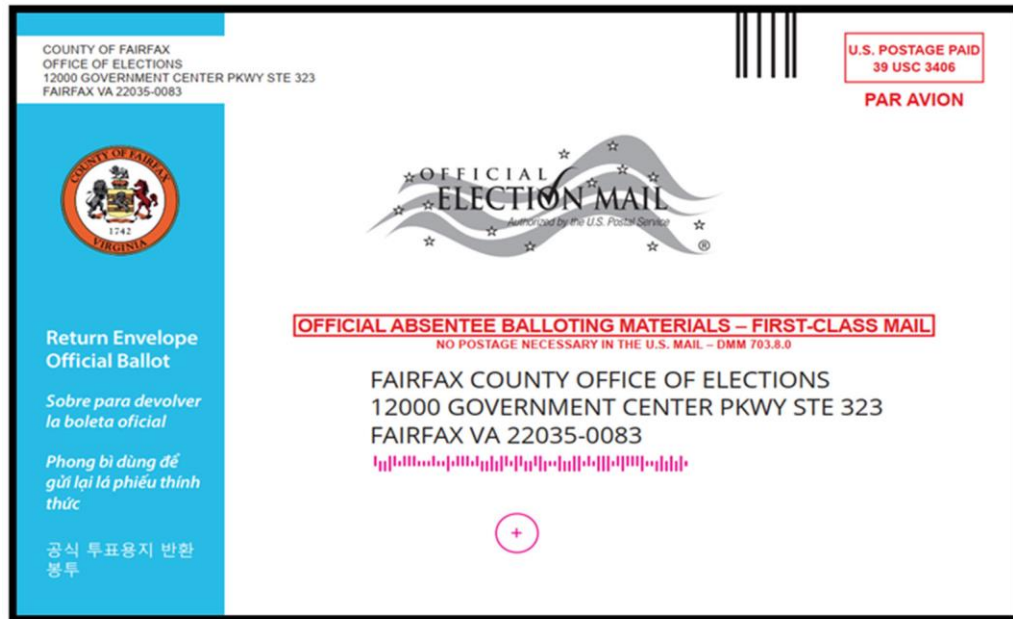


Figure 3 – UOCAVA Return Mailer – Front Side

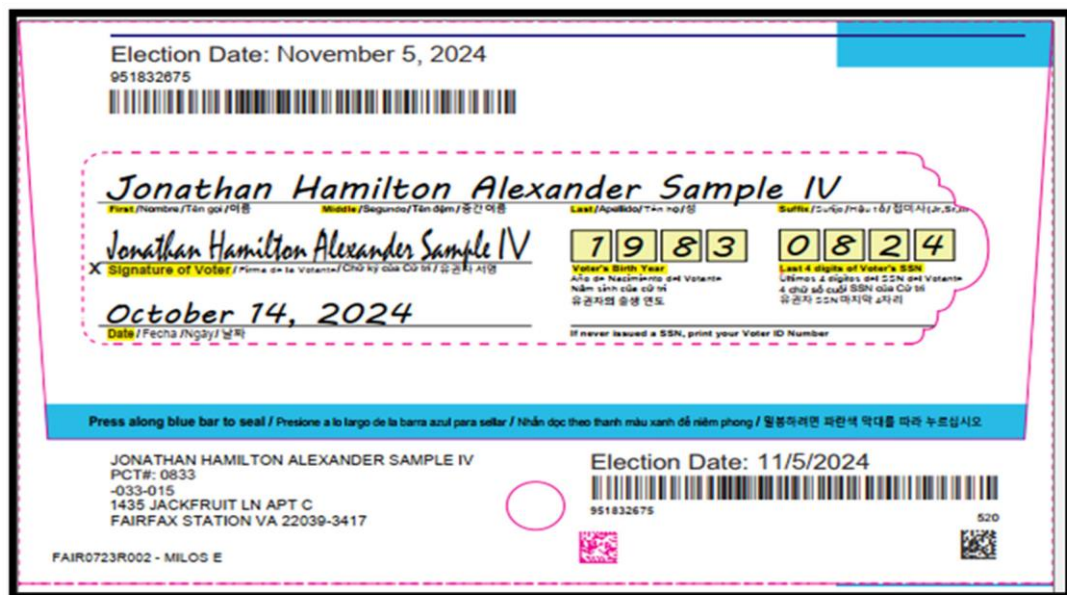


Figure 4 – UOCAVA Return Mailer – Reverse Side



