



**CIRCULATING AND CANVASSING
CITY/TOWNSHIP PETITION FORMS**

NOMINATING AND QUALIFYING PETITIONS

Michigan Department of State
Bureau of Elections
April 2020

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CIRCULATING AND CANVASSING CITY/TOWNSHIP PETITION FORMS NOMINATING AND QUALIFYING PETITIONS

This publication summarizes the laws, court rulings and Attorney General Opinions governing the validity of signatures on the following types of city/township petition forms:

Nominating Petition (City/Township Partisan)
Nominating Petition (City/Township Nonpartisan)
Qualifying Petition Candidate Without Party Affiliation (City/Township)
Village Non-Partisan Nominating Petition
School Nominating Petition
Metropolitan District Nominating Petition

WHICH PETITION FORM SHOULD BE USED?

There are several different types of petitions provided for candidates depending on the office sought, which are described below. A candidate's failure to use the proper petition form (i.e., partisan versus non-partisan, non-partisan versus qualifying) will result in his or her disqualification.

This publication explains the laws governing the circulation of city/township petitions, including the following:

City/Township Partisan Nominating Petition: Must be used by major party candidates seeking the office of County Commissioner and may be used by any major party candidate who seeks a partisan office.

City-Township Non-Partisan Nominating Petition: May be used by any candidate who seeks a nonpartisan office, except for candidates seeking the offices of school board member, intermediate school board member, community college trustee, library or district library board member. **Note:** The term "non-partisan" refers to the legal classification of the office sought, not the candidate's preference to refrain from associating with a particular political party. Examples of non-partisan offices include judicial offices, certain city offices, etc.

City/Township Qualifying Petition: Must be used by a candidate who does not affiliate with a recognized political party seeking the office of County Commissioner and may be used by any candidate without political party affiliation who seeks a partisan office. **Note:** The qualifying petition is used by candidates who express no preference for a particular political party (i.e., are sometimes referred to independents) but are seeking an office that is legally classified as a partisan office. Examples of partisan offices include County Commissioner, Township Trustee, etc.

Continued on next page

School Nominating Petition: Restricted to candidates seeking school board positions including school board member, community college trustee, library or district library board member. Specially designed options are available for candidates seeking election as an intermediate school board member or community college trustee.

Village Non-Partisan Nominating Petition: Restricted to candidates seeking village offices.

Metropolitan District Nominating Petition: Restricted to candidates seeking metropolitan district offices.

Recall Petition: Recall petitions are restricted to the City/Township format and cannot be circulated on a countywide basis.

Other types of candidate petitions not covered by this publication include the Countywide Partisan Nominating Petition, Countywide Qualifying Petition, and Countywide Non-Partisan Nominating Petition. Candidates using one of these types of petition forms should refer to the publication, Circulating and Canvassing Countywide Nominating and Qualifying Petition Forms.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- A petition sheet is valid if it includes the circulator's signature; the date on which the circulator signed the petition; the circulator's complete residence address (street address or rural route number, city or township and state); and for a circulator who is not a Michigan resident, the name of the county where the circulator is registered to vote (if applicable) and the circulator's mark (cross or check mark) in the nonresident box in the Certificate of Circulator.
- A petition sheet is invalid and none of the signatures affixed to the sheet will be counted as valid if the circulator is not a resident of Michigan and fails to mark the nonresident box in the Certificate of Circulator.
- A petition sheet must include the name of the county and city or township where it was circulated; each sheet must list only a single county, city or township.
- An individual signature is valid if it includes the signer's signature; the street address or rural route number; and the date on which the signature was affixed to the petition.
- An individual signature entry is invalid if the QVF indicates that on the date of signing, the signer was:
 1. Not registered to vote in Michigan, or
 2. Registered to vote in this state but not in the city or township indicated.

Certain variations or errors are acceptable and will not cause a signature or entire petition sheet to be rejected. For further information, see “Acceptable Sheet Variations” and “Acceptable Signature Variations” below.

PETITION SHEET VALIDITY

Imperfections in the petition sheet heading, certificate of circulator, or body of the petition sheet may jeopardize the validity of signatures appearing on the sheet.

Defects in the petition heading which render an entire sheet invalid. A petition sheet is invalid if it contains one or more of the following defects in the heading:

- The county, city or township of circulation is omitted, or two or more jurisdictions are listed, and it is not apparent that circulation was confined to a single county, city or township.
- For villages that lie within more than one township, the city/township petition sheet is invalid if only the name of the village is given in the heading of the petition.
- For cities and townships located within a single county that share the same name, the city/township petition sheet if the wrong unit of government is designated in the petition heading. Examples include but are not limited to a candidate seeking election to a public office in the City of Lansing who incorrectly designates Lansing Township in the heading of the petition.
- Required information concerning candidate or office sought omitted, including the candidate’s name, residence address, party affiliation (if applicable), the office sought, and the district served by the office (if any). (Note: In addition, candidates seeking judicial offices must follow the instructions for completing the heading, which are printed on the reverse side of the City/Township Non-Partisan petition form.)

Defects in the certificate of circulator which render an entire sheet invalid. A petition sheet is invalid if it contains one or more of the following defects in the circulator’s certificate:

- The petition sheet is not signed by the circulator or is signed by more than one circulator.
- The circulator’s date of signing is omitted, incomplete or earlier than the date entered by every petition signer.
- The circulator’s residence address is omitted, incomplete or includes a P.O. Box in place of a street address or rural route. (Note: The circulator’s failure to include the correct zip code, by itself, is not a fatal defect.)
- Attention nonresident petition circulators: A petition sheet is invalid if the circulator is not a Michigan resident and fails to mark the nonresident box in the certificate of circulator.

Other fatal defects that render an entire petition sheet invalid.

- Damaged, mutilated or torn petition sheets where any of the mandatory elements (heading, warning statements, circulator certificate, etc.) are illegible or omitted.
- Sheets where any of the mandatory elements (heading, warning statements, circulator certificate, etc.) are obscured or covered by white-out, permanent marker, stickers or other opaque material.

Acceptable sheet variations. The following variations will not cause an entire petition sheet to be rejected:

- The circulator fails to designate “City” or “Township” in the petition heading, regardless of whether a city and township located within the same county share the same name. Examples include but are not limited to the failure to differentiate the City of Kalamazoo from Kalamazoo Township.
- The circulator designates both the “City” and “Township” in the petition heading, regardless of whether a city and township within the same county share the same name
- For all offices except certain judicial offices, the failure to include the “Term Expiration Date” does not render a petition sheet invalid if the filing official can ascertain which position the candidate is seeking. For example, if a candidate is seeking nomination or election to the office of County Clerk, the candidate is not required to include the “Term Expiration Date” because there is only one position to be elected. If there are multiple positions available with different term ending dates, the candidate should include the “Term Expiration Date.”

Note: Judicial candidates seeking office in a district in which a combination of full terms and partial terms will appear on the ballot must follow the instructions printed on the reverse side of the Countywide Non-Partisan nominating petition with respect to the “Term Expiration Date.”

- All of the following variations are acceptable: The circulator’s signature is illegible; circulator prints his or her name in space provided for the signature and signs in the space for printed name; circulator omits his or her printed name; circulator enters his or her cursive signature in space provided for printed name. (Note: The petition sheet is invalid if the circulator merely prints his or her name and fails to sign the petition.)
- The circulator omits his or her zip code or enters an incorrect zip code.
- The circulator prints the name of a village or unincorporated place instead of the township in which he or she resides, as long as the village or unincorporated place is wholly contained within a single township.
- The circulator omits the county of registration.

- The circulator is a resident of Michigan and inadvertently checks the out-of-state circulator checkbox and/or writes the name of the Michigan county where he or she is registered to vote.

VALIDITY OF INDIVIDUAL SIGNATURES

A signature is valid if the voter signs the petition and prints his or her street address or rural route, and date of signing. (The signer’s omission of his or her printed name or zip code is an acceptable variation.) Filing officials use the code “R” (registered) for valid entries.

A signature is invalid if it contains one or more of the defects or omissions listed below. The codes used to mark defects and omissions on petition sheets are shown to the left of the descriptions.

| INVALID ENTRY CODE | EXPLANATION | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|------------------|----------------------|--------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| <i>SIGNATURE ERRORS</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| CO | Signature was crossed out prior to filing. | | | | | | | | | |
| DUP | Signer signed petition multiple times, or signed nominating petitions for more candidates than there are persons to be elected to the office. <i>Note:</i> Duplicate signatures are invalid only if both entries would have been coded R, but for the fact that the signer signed the petition multiple times or for multiple candidates seeking the same office. ¹ | | | | | | | | | |
| NR | On the date of signing, the signer was not registered to vote anywhere in the city or township indicated or was not registered within the electoral district. <i>Note:</i> If a signer is registered to vote at a different address within the same city or township as is written on the petition, the signature is valid. See examples below: <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Petition Address</td> <td style="text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Registration Address</td> <td style="text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Result</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">123 Main St., Mason</td> <td style="text-align: center;">987 Maple St., Mason</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Valid entry</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">456 Maple St., Flint</td> <td style="text-align: center;">456 Maple St., Mt. Morris</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Invalid entry</td> </tr> </table> | Petition Address | Registration Address | Result | 123 Main St., Mason | 987 Maple St., Mason | Valid entry | 456 Maple St., Flint | 456 Maple St., Mt. Morris | Invalid entry |
| Petition Address | Registration Address | Result | | | | | | | | |
| 123 Main St., Mason | 987 Maple St., Mason | Valid entry | | | | | | | | |
| 456 Maple St., Flint | 456 Maple St., Mt. Morris | Invalid entry | | | | | | | | |
| IN | Incomplete signature, meaning the petition signature given as follows and does not match the signature on file: “Ms. Smith,” “Mr. Jones,” “Jane,” “JD.” | | | | | | | | | |
| NS | No signature, meaning the signature was omitted or signer printed his or her name and the signature on file is cursive. | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>ADDRESS AND JURISDICTION ERRORS</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| NA | Street address or rural route is omitted or incomplete, or signer wrote a P.O. Box in place of a street address. | | | | | | | | | |
| OC | The address given is located outside of the city or township listed. | | | | | | | | | |
| OD | The address given is located within the city or township listed, but outside of the electoral district for the office sought. | | | | | | | | | |
| NC | There is no city or township by that name located within the county listed in the heading of the petition. | | | | | | | | | |

¹ For example, if a voter signs a petition twice but omits the date of signing for one of the signatures (rendering that entry invalid), no duplicate is found.

| INVALID ENTRY CODE | EXPLANATION |
|-----------------------------|---|
| DUAL | Dual jurisdiction entry, meaning the heading includes the names of two or more jurisdictions in the space for the city or township where registered. |
| IC | A village or unincorporated place was listed instead of the township where the signer is registered, but only if the village or unincorporated place lies within two or more townships. |
| DATE ERRORS | |
| ED | Voter's signature is dated before the first date of the current term of the office sought. For example, a Nominating Petition (City/Township Partisan) filed by a candidate seeking the office of Township Trustee in 2020 may be circulated as early as January 1, 2017. <i>Note:</i> For qualifying petitions only, any signature that is dated more than 180 days prior to the date of filing is invalid. |
| ND | The signature is undated, or an incomplete date is given. |
| SDC | The signature is dated after the circulator dated his or her signature. |
| MISCELLANEOUS ERRORS | |
| CIRC | A fatal defect in the circulator's certificate that renders the entire petition sheet invalid. Examples include but are not limited to the omission of the circulator's signature; an incorrect or incomplete address or date of signing; an out-of-state circulator's failure to check the box; etc. |
| HEAD | A fatal defect in the petition heading that renders the entire sheet invalid. Examples include but are not limited to omission of the candidate's name, residence address, party affiliation (if applicable), the office sought, etc. |
| DMG | A petition sheet that is damaged, mutilated or torn such that any mandatory element (heading, warning statements, circulator certificate, etc.) is illegible or omitted; or petition sheets where any of the mandatory elements are obscured or covered by white-out, permanent marker, stickers or other opaque material. |
| MC | Miscellaneous identification problem. |

Acceptable signature variations. The following variations are acceptable and will not result in the rejection of an individual signature:

- The signature includes one or more of the signer's initials plus his or her last name. Acceptable entries include but are not limited to: J. Smith; J.B. Smith; Mrs. J. Jones; A. John Doe.
- The signature is illegible.²
- All of the following variations are acceptable: The signer prints his or her name in space provided for signature and signs in the space for printed name; signer omits his or her printed name; signer enters his or her cursive signature in space provided for printed name.

² Note, however, that if *all* the personally identifiable information in the petition entry is illegible and cannot be validated (signature, printed name, address, city or township), the signature may be coded as invalid.

(Note: A signature is invalid if the signer merely prints his or her name in the space provided for printed name, fails to sign the petition, and the signature on file is a cursive signature.)

- The signer is unable to sign his or her name and uses a signature stamp (instead of a pen-and-ink signature).
- The signer enters ditto marks in the space(s) provided for address, zip code or date of signing.
- On the date of signing, the signer was registered to vote in the city or township indicated but at a different street address within the same city or township.
- The signer omits his or her zip code or enters an incorrect zip code.

**SPECIAL NOTES REGARDING POSTAL ADDRESSES,
UNINCORPORATED PLACES AND VILLAGES**

- While some villages and unincorporated places are wholly contained within a single township, others cross township boundaries. A village resident who signs a City/Township petition form must sign a sheet that aligns with his or her township of registration. (Note: Some villages also cross county lines; voters must sign the petition sheet that aligns with their county of registration.)
- If the name of a village is listed in the heading of a City/Township petition, the sheet is valid only if the village is wholly contained within a single township. A City/Township petition sheet will be found invalid if the heading lists the name of a village and that village is located within multiple townships.

NEW FOR 2019-2020 Abbreviations for jurisdiction names are acceptable if the abbreviation reasonably corresponds to the name of the appropriate city, township, local post office, unincorporated place, or village. Examples of commonly used abbreviations include but are not limited to the following:

| Abbreviation | Corresponds to ... | County |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| AA, A ² | Ann Arbor city, Ann Arbor Township | Washtenaw |
| BC | Battle Creek | Calhoun |
| BH | Benton Harbor | Berrien |
| BH, Blfd Hlls | Bloomfield Hills | Oakland |
| D'born | Dearborn | Wayne |
| D'born Hts | Dearborn Heights | Wayne |
| Det | Detroit | Wayne |
| EL, E Lan | East Lansing | Ingham |
| Farm | Farmington | Oakland |
| FH, Farm Hlls | Farmington Hills | Oakland |
| Fnt | Flint city, Flint Township | Genesee |

| Abbreviation | Corresponds to ... | County |
|---------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| GR | Grand Rapids | Kent |
| GP | Grosse Pointe | Wayne |
| GPF | Grosse Pointe Farms | Wayne |
| GPP | Grosse Pointe Park | Wayne |
| GPS | Grosse Pointe Shores | Wayne |
| GPW | Grosse Pointe Woods | Wayne |
| HP | Highland Park | Wayne |
| Kal, K'zoo | Kalamazoo | Kalamazoo |
| Lan | Lansing | Ingham |
| Musk | Muskegon | Muskegon |
| Sag | Saginaw city, Saginaw Township | Saginaw |
| SSM | Sault Ste. Marie | Chippewa |
| SH | Shelby Township | Macomb |
| SH, Ster Hgts | Sterling Heights | Macomb |
| S'fld | Southfield | Oakland |
| SCS | St. Clair Shores | Macomb |
| St. Joe | St. Joseph | Berrien |
| TC | Traverse City | Grand Traverse |
| WB | West Bloomfield | Oakland |
| Ypsi | Ypsilanti | Washtenaw |

SIGNATURE VERIFICATION

Circulators should encourage voters to sign petitions in a way that reasonably resembles the signature given for driver's license/state ID or voter registration purposes, but it is not necessary for the voter's signature to perfectly match the signature on file. Filing officials must perform their signature verification duties with the presumption that a voter's petition signature is his or her genuine signature, as there are numerous legitimate reasons that may explain an apparent mismatch:

- Petition signatures are often written on a clipboard, which may cause the signature to appear more slanted or less precise than the signature on file, or cause breaks or pauses in a cursive signature.
- Petition signatures (or voter registration or pin-pad signatures collected during the driver's license/state ID application process) could have been written in haste.
- A medical condition or advancing age may cause the signature to be different.
- The electronic signature on file may be smaller or larger than the signature given on a petition sheet.
- The signature may have been written using a pen with a finer tip or one with fading ink as compared to the signature on file.

None of these differences will result in the invalidation of the petition signature. If there are any redeeming qualities in the petition signature as compared to the signature on file, the filing official should treat the signature as valid. Redeeming qualities may include but are not limited to similar distinctive flourishes, more matching features than nonmatching features, and Examples 1-5 below.

A voter's signature should be considered questionable only if it differs in multiple, significant and obvious respects from the signature on file; see Examples 6-7 below. Slight dissimilarities should be resolved in favor of the voter whenever possible.

| # | Petition Signature Verification Examples | Recommended Result |
|----|---|------------------------|
| 1. | Signature appears as if voter's hand is trembling or shaking, possibly due to a health condition or advancing age: <i>Catherine Metzger</i> versus  | Valid signature |
| 2. | Only part of the signature matches the signature on file such as only the first letters of the first and last name match, but rest of signature does not match: <i>J. D.</i> versus <i>Jane Doe</i> <i>J. Doe</i> versus <i>Jane Doe</i> | Valid signature |
| 3. | Signature is partially printed but at the same time, partially matches the signature on file: <i>Alice Robinson</i> versus <i>Alice Robinson</i> | Valid signature |
| 4. | Signature is a recognized diminutive of the voter's full legal name: <i>Bill Smith</i> versus <i>William Smith</i> | Valid signature |
| 5. | Signature style has changed slightly over time: <i>Lucinda Jones</i> versus <i>Lucinda Jones</i> | Valid signature |
| 6. | Signature is entirely printed but signature on file is entirely written in cursive: JAMES DAVIS versus <i>James Davis</i> | Questionable signature |
| 7. | Signature differs in multiple, significant and obvious respects:  versus  | Questionable signature |

PETITION CANVASS PROCESS

Nominating and qualifying petitions must be timely filed with the filing official designated by law to accept filings for the elective office sought. Petitions are canvassed by the designated filing official.

A sworn complaint (challenge) alleging that the nominating or qualifying petition contains an insufficient number of valid signatures or is otherwise defective may be submitted to the appropriate filing official within 7 days of the filing deadline. Challenges are resolved by the filing official.

BEST PRACTICES

Train your petition circulators. Informing petition circulators of the requirements described in this publication can minimize the likelihood that whole petition sheets and individual signatures are rejected. Errors may be averted if circulators take the following actions:

- Write the name of the county of circulation in the heading of the petition.
- Ask potential signers whether and where they are registered to vote.
- Instruct signers to provide their street address or rural route where indicated; a P.O. Box is invalid.
- Remind signers to write the date of signing, not their date of birth.
- Review each signer's entry for completeness. If information is omitted, ask the signer to fill in the blank(s).
- Encourage signers to sign in a way that reasonably resembles the signature given for driver's license/state ID or voter registration purposes. It is not necessary for the signer's petition signature to be a perfect match with the signature on file. See "Signature Verification" above.
- Once circulation of a petition sheet is complete, ensure that the circulator signs and dates the certificate of circulator and provides the required information. If the circulator is not a Michigan resident, he or she must also check the nonresident box in the bottom left corner of the petition sheet and write the name of the county where registered to vote, if any.

Exercise care when circulating in or near cities and villages that cross county lines.

Several cities and villages in Michigan overlap county boundary lines. When obtaining a signature from a voter who is registered in a city or village that crosses county boundaries, make sure the voter signs the petition sheet that aligns with the signer's county of registration.

Implement a quality control process before filing the petition. Candidates are strongly encouraged to obtain a copy of the Qualified Voter File (QVF) for pre-filing verification purposes. Any petition signatures found to be invalid during the quality control process (i.e., because the street address or date is omitted) can be crossed out prior to filing; crossed out signatures are excluded when determining the maximum number of signatures filed.

Review all petition sheets prior to filing for completeness, especially the name of the county of circulation and the Certificate of Circulator.

File enough signatures. Candidates are strongly encouraged to gather and file substantially more signatures than the minimum number required. The number of excess signatures needed will vary depending on the vigorousness of the candidate's quality control process. Even if the petition has been verified by a professional signature gathering firm prior to filing, note that (1) A challenge may be filed against the sufficiency of the nominating or qualifying petition, and (2) There is a likelihood that some signatures or whole petition sheets may be found to be invalid during the canvass process. However, note that there is an upper limit on the maximum number of signatures that may be filed; see MCL 168.544f for further information.

IMPORTANT

The information in this brochure is offered as a summary of the provisions governing the validity of petition signatures; it is not a complete description or interpretation of all the applicable laws. Questions may be addressed to:

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