Numbered Memo 2022-07

TO: County Boards of Elections  
FROM: Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director  
RE: Absentee Envelope Supply for 2022 General Election  
DATE: July 20, 2022

This numbered memo provides information about the absentee container-return envelope supply that must be ordered for the November 8, 2022 general election. Further guidance will be issued as needed (e.g., if a new court order requires further revision to the envelope).

Due to recent court orders related to felon voting rights and assistance to disabled absentee voters, the language on absentee envelopes must be modified. This means county boards will need to procure new absentee envelopes for the general election. Several county boards of elections have contacted the State Board of Elections to request guidance for ordering absentee envelopes for the general election in light of difficulties obtaining new envelopes due to the nationwide paper shortage. Counties should be mindful that the paper supply shortage is projected to continue into 2023 and 2024.

County boards shall follow this guidance in procuring absentee envelopes:

1. **Make every effort to procure new envelopes with the correct language.** State Board staff have been touch with several printers to assist county boards with this effort. Please put in a helpdesk ticket if you would like assistance identifying additional printers who may have envelope stock.

   If a county board has made every effort to procure sufficient new envelopes but has not been successful, it may use labels to cover the old language on envelopes. A county board that uses labels must ensure that the labels are properly applied to every envelope before it is sent to the voter. The use of labels is a secondary preference since labels can be applied incorrectly or become damaged in the mail stream. Based on testing of sample envelopes containing labels by the State Board, the envelopes do not appear to exceed the current postage rate for ballot return envelopes; however, county boards should verify this before mailing any labeled envelopes to voters.
2. **Use standard-size return envelopes (6” x 11.375”).** County boards may not use larger absentee return envelopes because doing so could increase the postage that the voter must apply to return their ballot. At its current size, the envelope may be mailed with a first-class stamp, and any increase in size may require additional postage that voters are not likely anticipating.

3. **Use white or other neutral-colored envelopes.** It is permissible to use light grey, cream, or other neutral-colored paper if the yellow highlighting in the required fields remains easily visible. County boards may not use envelopes of any color that might be viewed as partisan or could make the highlighting difficult to read.

4. **Procure a sufficient supply of envelopes.** In determining how many envelopes to order for the general election, county boards shall first review data on the percentage of county registrants voting by mail in the 2014 and 2018 general elections, and apply those percentages to current registration numbers. Keep in mind, however, that absentee participation this year may be higher than in those previous elections, due to (1) the ongoing pandemic, (2) potential changes in voter behavior following the widespread use of absentee-by-mail voting in the 2020 general election, and (3) the ease of requesting an absentee ballot through the online portal which was not available in those prior elections. Also consider any increased use of absentee-by-mail voting in the 2022 primary, relative to previous similar primary elections. Factor in all of these considerations when placing your county’s order.

County boards may use a label to cover the felon language on the UOCAVA return envelope, due to the very limited number of UOCAVA voters who request to receive their absentee ballot by mail.