



Dyana Limon-Mercado
Travis County Clerk
P.O. Box 149325, Austin, Texas 78714
5501 Airport Blvd, Austin, Texas 78751
www.traviscountyclerk.org

**TRAVIS COUNTY CLERK
ELECTIONS DIVISION
CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PLAN
May 4, 2024**

PURPOSE:

Section 127.007 of the Texas Election Code requires the Manager of the Central Counting Station (“CCS”) to “establish and implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the Central Counting Station.” This plan must be made available to the public on request not later than 5:00 pm on the fifth day before the date of the election, which is Tuesday, April 30, 2024.

Section 127.007(b) provides that a CCS plan “must address the process for comparing the number of voters who signed the combination form with the number of votes cast for an entire election.”

A. LOCATION:

The Travis County Central Counting Station will be located at Travis County Elections Division 5501 Airport Blvd. Austin, TX 78751. The Central Counting Station will convene at 10:00 am on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, and 3:00 pm on Saturday, May 4, 2024, and at 10:00 am Monday, May 13, 2024.

B. CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PERSONNEL:

The following are the roles and responsibilities inside the Central Counting Station, as contained in Sections 127.002-127.006 of the Texas Election Code:

Central Count Presiding & Alternate Judges: Charlene Casillas, Marco Ramirez
Central Station Manager: Sarah Wood
Tabulation Supervisor: Christopher Baldenhofer
Assistants to Tabulation Supervisor: Neil Plumbley, Cindy Ramirez, Jacqueline Augenbraun, John Bennett, Emma Lever, Kyle Barsalou, Robert Espinosa, Scott Flom, and other qualified employees of Travis County (as needed).

- Sarah Wood will serve as the Central Counting Station Manager to manage the overall administration of the station and supervision of personnel. (Section 127.002)
- Christopher Baldenhofer will serve as the Tabulation Supervisor to operate automatic tabulating equipment. (Section 127.003)
- The Assistants to Tabulation Supervisors will assist the Tabulation Supervisor in the operation of the automatic tabulating equipment as directed by the Tabulation Supervisor. (Section 127.004)
- The Presiding Judges will serve to maintain order at the Central Counting Station, administer oaths, and receive ballots to be counted. (Section 127.005).

Note: The Presiding Judges are entitled to compensation at the same rate as a precinct Presiding Judge, except that the counting station judge is entitled to a minimum compensation of five hours' pay regardless of the amount of time worked. (Section 127.005(d))

- Central Counting Station Clerks may be appointed as needed by the Central Counting Station Manager, as well as the Presiding & Alternate Judges as needed as outlined Section 127.006 of the Election Code.

Note: To be eligible to serve as a clerk a person must be a qualified voter of the county in which the central counting station is located. The general custodian of election records, an employee of the custodian, or any other employee of a political subdivision is not ineligible to serve as a clerk under this section because the person is a qualified voter of a county other than the county in which the Central Counting Station is located or because of the custodian's status as a candidate or officeholder. (Section 127.006(b))

A clerk appointed by the Manager serves under the Manager and shall perform the functions directed by the Manager. A clerk appointed by the Presiding or Alternate Judge serves under the Presiding or Alternate Judge and shall perform the functions directed by the Judges. (Section 127.006(c))

A clerk is entitled to compensation at the same rate as a precinct election clerk, except that a clerk who serves for the entire time a counting station is in operation is entitled to a minimum compensation of three hours' pay regardless of the amount of time worked. (Section 127.006(d))

C. PROCEDURES FOR CONVENING THE CENTRAL COUNTING STATION:

Section 87.0241(b)(2) of the Texas Election Code dictates when an entity is permitted to count ballots.

The Central Counting Station will convene based on the size and type of election as determined by the Central Counting Station Manager and the Presiding Judges.

The Central Counting Station will begin the process to count ballots voted by mail and all in-person early voting ballots on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at 10:00 am. In accordance with Section 127.093 of the Texas Election Code, the second test of tabulating equipment will be conducted prior to beginning the process to count early voting ballots on Wednesday, May 1, 2024.

The Central Counting Station will begin the process to count Election Day ballots on Saturday, May 4, 2024, starting at 7:00 pm or when Election Judges arrives with the results stick.

D. ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS:

Section 127.0015 of the Texas Election Code prescribes a required oath for all CCS personnel.

This oath will be administered verbally to all members of the early voting ballot board and all personnel at the central counting station prior to the performance of any duties by the board or the Central Counting Station.

For use in the May 4, 2024, election:

“I swear (or affirm) that I will objectively work to be sure every eligible voter’s vote is accepted and counted, and that only the ballots of those voters who violated the Texas Election Code will be rejected. I will make every effort to correctly reflect the voter’s intent when it can be clearly determined. I will not work alone when ballots are present and will work only in the presence of a member of a political party different from my own. I will faithfully perform my duty as an officer of the election and guard the purity of the election.”

E. INTAKE OF BALLOTS, ELECTRONIC MEDIA, AND SUPPLIES:

Section 129.051 & 129.052 of the Texas Election Code require the general custodian of election records to develop certain procedures related to inventory control and chain of custody of voting system equipment and electronic media associated with this equipment, providing for verification of equipment identifiers, verification of seals, and verification of chain of custody.

- Election Judge, or their designee, brings voted paper ballot cards (in locked and sealed blue ballot bin) and results sticks (in sealed green election results bag) to the Travis County Elections Division intake located in the Multipurpose Room at 5501 Airport Blvd., Austin, Texas 78751.
- Intake personnel will verify location tags and verify the seals on the green results bags and blue ballot bins are the same as the seal numbers on the seal log.
- Intake personnel will deliver the ballot bin to a secure area in the warehouse and deliver the green election results bag with the results stick to the Multipurpose Room where Central Counting Station Clerks will verify the seal numbers with the Ballot and Seal Certificate under the supervision of a clerk assigned by the Presiding Judges. A scan will be conducted on the outside label of the results stick for location tracking purposes in the Ready Board module. This is done to track the physical location of the results stick and to keep track of how many sticks have been received and processed and how many are still outstanding. A chart will be displayed to show the status.

F. DUPLICATION OF BALLOTS:

Certain ballots that are counted with automatic tabulating equipment may have to be duplicated if the ballot is damaged or cannot be read with the scanning equipment.

- The Central Count Station Manager will have any ballots that are damaged or otherwise unreadable by the scanner reduplicated in accordance with Section 127.126 of the Texas Election Code.

G. RESOLVING VOTER INTENT:

At the direction of the CCS Manager, CCS clerks will resolve any voter intent questions on the ballots as they are duplicated or manually counted, as applicable. (Section 127.125)

- The Presiding Judges and other members will make a determination of voter intent prior to duplication of a ballot.
- The duplicate ballot will then be created under the supervision of the Presiding Judges in the manner in which the voter’s intent was determined.

H. TABULATION PROCEDURES:

Early Voting Ballots After Early Voting – Wednesday, May 1, 2024

- Presiding Judges will confirm seals match the Seal Log for Green Early Voting Results Bags and Blue Ballot Bins.

- Election results bags are opened, and results stick is verified and then placed into sealed containers and secured until the Tabulation Supervisor is ready to read results sticks into ElectionWare. Ballot Bins will be stored in a vault and remain unopened until needed.
- In ElectionWare, before any data from the tabulation test is loaded, a Zero Report will be printed from the ElectionWare software and signed by the Tabulation Supervisor and tabulation assistants and Presiding Judges of Central Count.
- The second test of the tabulation equipment will be conducted. (Section 127.093 & 127.097)
- In ElectionWare, before any data from the early voting mail ballots are counted or results sticks are loaded, a Zero Report will be printed from the ElectionWare software and signed by the Tabulation Supervisor and tabulation assistants and Presiding Judges of Central Count.
- After Ballot Board completes their review of all Early Voting ballots by mail to be tabulated in the Central Count Station, approved ballots will be scanned by the DS950, DS850 & DS450, the resolution board under the direction of the Presiding Judges will resolve any ballots needing to be reviewed.
- After all Early Voting ballots by mail to be tabulated in the Central Count Station have been scanned; results will be saved to the results stick and read into ElectionWare, then sealed and stored in the vault by the Tabulation Supervisor and/or tabulation assistants.
- Ballots voted by mail will be placed back into the blue ballot bins, which will be sealed with the seal numbers recorded by the Presiding Judges of Early Voting Ballot Board and stored in the vault.

Election Day – Saturday, May 4, 2024

- All results will be read into the ElectionWare software by the Tabulation Supervisor with tabulation assistants present and the Presiding Judges of Central Count.
- Any un-scanned approved ballots will be scanned at the DS950, DS850 & DS450, and any ballots needing to be reviewed will be resolved by the resolution board under the direction of the Presiding Judges.
- Results will be saved onto the results stick and loaded into the ElectionWare.
- Tabulation Supervisor and tabulation assistants will confirm the results sticks for each site have been loaded and are all accounted for.
- On Election Day, early voting ballots, including ballots by mail to be tabulated in the Central Counting Station, received up to that point will be tabulated before 7:00 pm, but in no case will results reports be released to the public before that time.
- Results tapes will be printed and signed at the Central Counting Station by the Presiding Judges.

Emergency Ballot Bin Procedures

Early Voting Sites:

- Emergency ballots will be sorted by EV site.
- The Central Count Manager/Presiding Judge will verify the seal numbers and the quantities of the emergency ballot transmittal/tracking form in each sealed bag.
- For each EV site that had emergency ballots cast, the Central Count Judge/Manager will have the polling location's poll reopened on a DS200 using the results stick returned from the appropriate site.
- Staff will scan in the appropriate ballots to their corresponding EV/ED site and reconcile the number of ballots cast and scanned according to normal procedures.

Election Day Sites:

- Emergency ballots bags will be received at the Central Counting Station on election night.
- CCS staff will verify locks and seals against the transmittal/tracking form in each bag and open the bag.
- The number of emergency ballots in the bag will be reconciled against the transmittal form.
- Emergency ballots from each site will be scanned using a tabulator onto a results stick labelled for each site and uploaded into the EMS.
- Results will be reconciled for each site according to normal procedures.

I. RECONCILIATION:

The process for comparing the number of voters listed as having voted and the number of ballots cast is done in three ways:

- Early Voting in Person – Compare the number of early voting check-ins from Precinct Central (electronic poll book) to the number of ballots cast.
- Early Voting by Mail – Compare the number of ballots entered on the “Ballot Transmittal Form” from the early voting ballot board to the number of ballots counted. (Section 87.021, 87.1221)
- Election Day – Compare the number of Election Day check-ins from Precinct Central (EPB) to the number of ballots cast. (Section 127.007(b))

Additionally, in accordance with Texas Election Code Section 127.131(f), the Presiding Judges of the Central Counting Station shall provide and attest to a written reconciliation of votes and voters at the close of tabulation for election day and again after the Central Counting Station meets for the last time to process late-arriving ballots

by mail and provisional ballots using a form created and rules promulgated by the secretary of state to facilitate compliance with this subsection. Once completed, the form shall be posted on a website maintained by the county along with election returns and results.

J. PRINTING OF PRECINCT RETURNS AND ELECTION TOTALS:

Under Section 127.127, the Tabulation Supervisor and the assistants to the Tabulation Supervisor are the only ones authorized to operate the automatic tabulating equipment or handle ballots that are automatically counted. After the counting of ballots (or accumulation of vote totals) has occurred, under the direction of the Presiding Judges of the CCS the precinct election returns are prepared. The Presiding Judges are required to sign a copy of the precinct returns to certify their accuracy. (Section 65.014, 127.131)

The printed “precinct by precinct” report will be adjusted to include any hand-counted ballots (if necessary) and constitutes our certified precinct returns. (Section 127.131(e))

The unofficial election results shall be released as soon as available after the polls close. Alternatively, the Presiding Judges of the CCS, in cooperation with the Elections Division Director may withhold the release of unofficial results until the last voter has voted. (Section 66.056, 127.1311)

Unofficial election results will be released via the Travis County Clerk Elections Division webpage, beginning no earlier than 7:00 pm on Election Day. Election Day results will be released incrementally as processed through acceptance and tabulation until all results are in.

K. REPORTING RESULTS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE:

For certain elections, including primary elections, the general election for state and county officers, and constitutional amendment elections, the SOS is required to tabulate the unofficial results statewide. (Section 68.001)

L. POLL WATCHERS:

Poll watchers are entitled to be present during the time the CCS has convened for the “purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station.” (Section 33.055)

The poll watcher must deliver both the certificate of appointment and the certificate of completion of the Texas SOS Poll Watcher Training to the Presiding Judges of the CCS and the watcher must countersign their certificate in the presence of the Presiding Judges. (Section 33.051)

A watcher may not be accepted for service if the watcher has possession of a device capable of recording images or sound unless the watcher agrees to disable or deactivate the device. (Section 33.051(c)) A watcher serving at Central Counting Station may be present at any time the station is open for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station. The watcher may serve during the hours the watcher chooses, except as provided by Subsection (b) a watcher may not leave during voting hours on Election Day without the Presiding Judge's permission if the counting of ballots at the Central Counting Station has begun.

Poll watcher(s) are entitled to sit or stand near enough to see and hear the activities (33.056). To ensure that all Poll Watchers can observe the activities in the tabulation room, the Presiding Judges will implement a system whereby Watchers will rotate into the tabulation room at predetermined intervals. Watchers will be selected sequentially from a roster that the Watchers will sign upon their arrival at the Central Counting Station. No more than two watchers will be permitted in the tabulation room at any given time, and party parity will be followed.

All activities of poll watcher(s) shall be in compliance with the current Poll Watchers Guide issued by the Secretary of State.

A poll watcher may request a printed copy of an audit log produced by a central accumulator:

- (1) before any votes are tabulated;
- (2) after early voting results are tabulated; and
- (3) immediately following the completion of the vote tabulation.

M. DELIVERY OF MATERIALS TO THE GENERAL CUSTODIAN OF ELECTION RECORDS:

After the completion of the counting of ballots both on Election Day and after Election Day, if necessary, voted ballot cards, electronic media, election records, and election equipment will be retained by this office, who is the general custodian of election records, through the appropriate retention period.

N. SECURITY PROCEDURES:

A Licensed Peace Officer will be posted at the CCS as required (Section 127.1232(a), Texas Election Code) at any time that the CCS is convened. Live video streaming will be active during the time the CCS is convened on the Travis County Clerk's Website (Section 127.1232(b), Texas Election Code).