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**CIRCULATING AND CANVASSING COUNTYWIDE  
NOMINATING AND QUALIFYING PETITION FORMS**

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Michigan Department of State  
Bureau of Elections  
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[www.Michigan.gov/elections](http://www.Michigan.gov/elections)

## CIRCULATING AND CANVASSING COUNTYWIDE PETITION FORMS

The following is a summary of the laws, court rulings and Attorney General Opinions which govern the validity of signatures on countywide nominating and qualifying petition forms.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- A signature is acceptable if it includes the name of the city or township where the signer is registered to vote; a mark to indicate whether the place of registration is a “city” or a “township”; the signer’s signature and name (cursive and printed); the signer’s street address or rural route number; the signer’s Zip Code; and the complete date on which the signer’s signature was affixed to the petition.
- Each signer must affix his or her signature to a petition sheet which bears -- in the heading of the sheet -- the name of the county in which the signer is registered to vote. The heading of the petition sheet shall list only one county.
- A signature is invalid if the signer is:
  1. Not registered to vote in Michigan, or
  2. Registered to vote in the state but not in the city or township listed, or
  3. Registered to vote in the city or township listed but the city or township is not within the county listed in the heading of the petition sheet.
- A petition sheet is acceptable if the circulator’s statement includes the circulator’s signature and name (cursive and printed); the date on which the circulator’s signature was affixed to the petition; the circulator’s complete residence address (street address or rural route number, city or township, state, and Zip Code); and for a circulator who is not a resident of Michigan, the circulator’s county of registration (if registered to vote) 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 shall 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.
- Certain variations are accepted. For further information, see “Acceptable Sheet Variations” and “Acceptable Signature Variations” below.

## PETITION SHEET VALIDITY

### DEFECTS IN THE 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 of the sheet:

- County where circulated not listed or more than one county of circulation listed – and it is not apparent from cities and townships listed by signers that circulation was within a single county.
- Required information concerning candidate or office sought omitted. This includes the candidate's name and address, party affiliation (if applicable), the office sought, and the district served by the office (if any). In addition, judicial candidates must follow the instructions for completing the heading that are printed on the reverse side of the nominating petition.

### 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:

- Not signed by circulator.
- Signed by more than one circulator.
- The date indicated in the Certificate of Circulator is missing, incomplete, or earlier than the date entered by every petition signer.
- The circulator's residence address is missing, incomplete, or includes a P.O. Box in lieu of a street address or rural route. (Note, however, that the circulator's failure to include the correct Zip Code, by itself, is not a fatal defect.)
- Special note for nonresident circulators only: A petition sheet is invalid if the circulator is not a resident of Michigan and fails to mark the nonresident box in the Certificate of Circulator.

### ACCEPTABLE SHEET VARIATIONS

The following variations do not render a petition sheet invalid:

- County where circulated not listed or more than one county of circulation listed – and it is apparent from cities and townships listed by signers that circulation was within a single county.

- For all offices except judicial offices, the failure to include the “Term Expiration Date” does not render a petition sheet invalid if it can be ascertained 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.” (Judicial candidates must follow the instructions printed on the reverse side of the nominating petition with respect to the “Term Expiration Date.”)
- Illegible circulator signature.
- Any of the following: circulator prints name in entry provided for signature; circulator fails to print name in entry provided for printed name; circulator enters his or her cursive signature in entry provided for printed name. (Note: a circulator’s signature is invalid if circulator prints name in entry provided for printed name and fails to enter his or her signature in the signature entry.)
- Circulator fails to enter his or her Zip Code or enters an incorrect Zip Code.
- Circulator lists 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.

**PETITION SIGNATURE VALIDITY**

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.

<b>CODE</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>
<b>JURISDICTION ERRORS</b>	
NC	No city or township by that name is located within the county listed in the heading of the petition.
IC	Village or “unincorporated place” is listed instead of the township where the signer resides, but only if the village or “unincorporated place” is located within two or more townships. <i>Note: for an explanation of the phrase, “unincorporated place,” please refer to the section below entitled, “Attention to Detail Advised,” and “Unincorporated Places.”</i>
DUAL	Dual jurisdiction entry; two or more jurisdictions are given.
<b>ADDRESS ERRORS</b>	
OC	The address given is located outside of the city or township listed.
NA	No street address or rural route number is given.
<b>DATE ERRORS</b>	
ND	Signature is undated or an incomplete date is given.

<b>CODE</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>
ED	Signature is dated before the first date the petition is authorized by law to be circulated.
SDC	Signature is dated after the circulator dated his or her signature.
<i>SIGNATURE ERRORS</i>	
CO	Signature is crossed out prior to filing.
IN	Incomplete signature. For example, signature appears as follows: "Mrs. Smith," "Mr., Smith," "Jane," "John."
NR	Signer is not registered to vote within the electoral district.
DUP	Signer signed petition twice (or more times), or signed nominating petitions for more candidates than there are persons to be elected to the office.
<i>MISCELLANEOUS ERRORS</i>	
MC	Miscellaneous identification problem.

### **ACCEPTABLE SIGNATURE VARIATIONS**

The following variations are acceptable and do not render a petition signature invalid:

- Signature appears as follows: J. Smith; J.B. Smith; Mrs. J. Brown; Mrs. J.B. Brown; Mrs. John Brown.
- Illegible signature.
- Any of the following: signer prints name in entry provided for signature; signer fails to print name in entry provided for printed name; signer enters his or her cursive signature in entry provided for printed name. (Note: a signature is invalid if signer prints name in entry provided for printed name -- and fails to enter his or her signature in the signature entry.)
- Signer fails to enter his or her Zip Code or enters an incorrect Zip Code.
- Ditto marks.
- Signer enters the community name appearing in his or her mailing address for his or her city or township of registration. (For example, a signature is acceptable if (1) the signer enters "East Lansing" on the petition, and (2) the signer is, in fact, registered to vote in Meridian Township, and (3) the signer has an "East Lansing" mailing address.) The validity of a signature accompanied by a community name which appears in the signer's mailing address is not affected by a city/township check off box error. This remains true if the community name appearing in the signer's mailing address is shared by both a city and a township in the county.
- Signer lists village or "unincorporated place" instead of township of registration when village or "unincorporated place" is contained within a single township.

- With respect to the signer’s selection of the “City” or “Township” box preceding the signature, the following principles apply:
  - A signature is valid even if the signer fails to indicate whether the jurisdiction of registration is a “city” or a “township.” (Note: the signature is valid regardless of whether (1) there is only one city or township by that name in the county listed in the heading, or (2) there is both a city and a township by that name in the county listed in the heading.)
  - A signature is valid even if the signer marks both the “city” box and the “township” box. (Note: the signature is valid regardless of whether (1) there is only one city or township by that name in the county listed in the heading, or (2) there is both a city and a township by that name in the county listed in the heading.)
  - There is only one circumstance in which a signer’s selection of the “city” or “township” box will render the signature invalid – if the signer selects the incorrect box. (For example, if the signer marks the box indicating that he or she is registered to vote in the City of Lansing but in fact is registered in Lansing Township, the signature is invalid.)

**ATTENTION TO DETAIL ADVISED**

Michigan contains 83 counties, 279 cities, 1,240 townships and 254 villages. Contained within Michigan’s townships are numerous “unincorporated places” which bear separate, unique names. Additionally, all of the state is served by post offices with names that in many cases do not correspond to the names of the cities, townships and villages they serve. Circulators using the “countywide” petition form are advised of the following:

**CITIES AND TOWNSHIPS:** All registered voters in Michigan are registered in a single city or township within the state. Because many cities and townships share the same name, it is important that the place of registration listed by each signer on the petition be clearly identified as a “city” or a “township.” For example, in Shiawassee County there is a City of Owosso and a Township of Owosso.

Remember, if a registered voter signs a petition sheet that lists in its heading the wrong county of registration, the signature is invalid. For example, if a voter registered in the City of Owosso signs a sheet which lists any county other than Shiawassee County in its heading, the signature is invalid.

A number of cities in the state overlap county boundary lines. (No townships overlap county boundaries.) When obtaining a signature from a voter who is registered in a city that crosses county boundaries, make sure that the voter signs a sheet which properly lists in its heading the signer’s county of registration.

**VILLAGES:** Villages are Michigan’s smallest units of government. Some villages are wholly contained within a single township; others cross township boundaries. (Villages are not contained within nor do they cross into cities.)

A village resident who signs a “countywide” petition must list his or her township of registration. Further, the signer must be registered to vote in the township listed. A signature affixed to the petition by a village resident will be found invalid if the person is not registered to vote in the appropriate township.

If an error is made and the signer lists the name of a village instead of his or her township of registration, the signature will be accepted only if the village is wholly contained within a single township. As noted above, the signer must be registered to vote in the appropriate township. A signature will be found invalid if the signer lists the name of a village instead of his or her township of registration and that village is located within multiple townships.

A number of villages in the state also overlap county boundary lines. When obtaining a signature from a voter who is registered in a village that crosses county boundaries, make sure that the voter signs a sheet which properly lists in its heading the signer’s county of registration.

**UNINCORPORATED PLACES:** Michigan contains a number of unincorporated places that, unlike cities, townships, and villages, do not qualify as separate units of government. Some unincorporated places are wholly contained within a single township; others cross township boundaries. (Unincorporated places generally are not contained within nor do they cross into cities. ) Michigan residents who live in unincorporated places register to vote with their township clerk.

A resident of an unincorporated place who wishes to sign a “countywide” petition form must list his or her township of registration. Further, the signer must be registered to vote in the township listed. If an error is made and a signer lists the name of an unincorporated place instead of his or her township of registration, the signature will be accepted only if the unincorporated place is wholly contained within a single township. A signature will be found invalid if the signer lists the name of an unincorporated place instead of his or her township of registration and that unincorporated place is located within multiple townships.

**POST OFFICES AND ZIP CODES:** All post offices are referred to by name and serve delivery areas of varying sizes. Each delivery area is assigned a Zip Code. In some cases, the name of a person’s post office will correspond to the name of the person’s city or township of residence. In other cases, especially in sparsely populated areas, the name of the person’s post office will not correspond to the name of the person’s city or township of residence. Thus, a person’s mailing address may or may not correspond to the name of the city or township where the person is registered to vote. For example, Mason residents are registered to vote in the City of Mason and have Mason mailing address. However, persons registered to vote in Genesee Township, Richfield Township and Vienna Township in Genesee County have a Mt. Morris mailing address.

The signature of a signer who lists the name of his or her post office for his or her city or township of registration is acceptable. For example, if a voter registered in Genesee Township, Genesee County lists Mt. Morris (the name of the voter's post office) for his or her township of registration, the signature will not be rejected for the error.

**IMPORTANT**

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

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Bureau of Elections  
P.O. Box 20126  
Lansing, Michigan 48901-0726  
Telephone: (517) 335-3234 or (800) 292-5973  
Fax: (517) 335-3235

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