



Petition Manual: New Political Party Qualification

February 2024

INSTRUCTIONS PROVIDED BY THE MICHIGAN BUREAU OF ELECTIONS
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I. Introduction

New political parties are required to gather petition signatures to gain ballot access in Michigan. The following political parties are currently qualified to appear on the ballot in the 2023-2024 election cycle:

Democratic Party
Republican Party
Libertarian Party
US Taxpayers Party
Green Party
Working Class Party
Natural Law Party

For a new political party to appear on the Nov. 5, 2024, General Election ballot, it must submit the minimal number of valid signatures within the required timeframes and on the required formats, as specified in Michigan Election Law, 1954 PA 116, MCL 168.1 *et seq.*



II. Petition Format and Filing

A. Petition format

The required format for a new political party petition is governed by [MCL 168.685](#) and includes the following:

- The petition form must be 8½ by 13 inches in size with text arranged horizontally.
- The phrase "Petition to Form New Political Party" and proposed name of the party must be printed in the heading of the petition in 24-point boldface type.
- Once a political party's name is established, the name cannot be changed without circulating petitions with the new political party name.
- The text of the following warning statement must be printed in 12-point boldface type: "Warning: A person who knowingly sign petitions to organize more than 1 new state political party, signs a petition to organize a new state political party more than once, or signs a name other than his or her own is violating the provisions of Michigan election law."

Additionally, petition forms may be circulated on a countywide or city/township basis, meaning signers must be registered to vote within the county or city/township listed in the heading of the petition.

If circulating on a **countywide** form, the heading of the petition must include the following statement in 8-point type:

We, the undersigned, duly registered electors of the county of _____, state of Michigan, residing at the places set opposite our names, respectfully request the secretary of state, in accordance with section 685 of the Michigan election law, 1954 PA 116, MCL 168.685, to place the names of the candidates of the _____ party on the ballot at the _____ election.



If circulating on a **city/township** form, the signature side of the petition must include the following statement in 8-point type:

We, the undersigned, duly registered electors of the
city _____ (Strike one)
township _____, county of _____,
state of Michigan, residing at the places set opposite our names, respectfully request the
secretary of state, in accordance with section 685 of the Michigan election law, 1954 PA 116, MCL
168.685, to place the names of the candidates of the _____
party on the ballot at the _____ election.

B. Identification of petition sponsor

The petition sheet must include the name and address of the person, group or organization paying for the printing of the petition form, in 8-point type, preceded by the words: "Paid for with regulated funds by _____." MCL 169.247.

C. Optional staff review of petition format

The Bureau of Elections (BOE) staff will provide two, optional, informal reviews of petition formatting requirements. These reviews do not constitute an approval, but a review of form only, at the staff level, for the benefit of petitioners.

Please note that while staff consultations include a thorough review of whether the petition complies with the technical formatting requirements, the following features are not subject to staff review and are solely the responsibility of the petition sponsor:

- The substance of the proposal which appears on the petition.
- The substance of the summary of the proposal which appears on the signature side of the petition.
- Whether the petition properly identifies provisions of the existing statute which would be altered or abrogated by a proposed amendment,
- The manner in which the proposal language is affixed to the petition.

If a statewide referendum petition does not comply with all the requirements of Michigan election law, signatures submitted on the petition will be considered invalid and will not be counted. MCL 168.482a(4). BOE strongly recommends that petition sponsors confer with their own legal counsel for advice regarding these aspects of their proposal prior to submission to the Board of State Canvassers and prior to circulation.



D. Optional Board pre-approval of petition format

Sponsors of new political party petitions are strongly encouraged to submit proof copies of the petition to the Board of State Canvassers (Board) for pre-approval of the form before gathering signatures. The Board requires sponsors to submit a Printer's Affidavit with 15 proof copies of the petition when seeking pre-approval of the petition format.

Best practice: Although Michigan election law does not require the sponsor of a new political party petition to seek pre-approval of the petition form, such approval greatly reduces the risk that signatures collected on the form will be ruled invalid due to formatting defects.

The Printer's Affidavit and an example Petition to Form New Political Party are provided in Appendix C and D, respectively.

FILING INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRE-APPROVAL:

1. Complete and sign the attached PRINTER'S AFFIDAVIT in the presence of a notary public and attach 15 proof copies of the petition. Materials must be sent to the Board of State Canvassers in care of the Bureau of Elections, Richard H. Austin Building, 430 West Allegan Street, 1st Floor, Lansing, Michigan 48918. This address may be used for hand delivery, overnight delivery, or U.S. mail.
2. Email a PDF of the petition to MDOS-File-Canvass@Michigan.gov. In the subject line of the email message, please indicate, "BSC – Petition Attached."
3. File final proof copies of petition sheets to be circulated, reflecting all necessary changes identified through the staff consultation process, at least 48 hours prior to the Board of State Canvassers meeting at which the petition is scheduled to be considered. If the petition sponsor fails to timely file all the required materials, the petition will not be placed on the meeting agenda.

E. Minimum number of valid signatures required

The number of valid signatures required to place a new political party on the General Election ballot is 44,620 signatures, which equals "not less than 1 percent of the total number of votes cast for all candidates for governor at the last election in which a governor was elected." MCL 168.685(1).



At the Nov. 7, 2022, General Election, 4,461,972 votes were cast for all candidates seeking the office of Governor.

Best practices:

Petition sponsors are strongly encouraged to gather and submit a significant number of signatures over the minimum required due to the likelihood that some petition signatures or whole petition sheets may be found invalid during the verification process.

Sponsors are urged to check petition signers' registration status, address, and city or township of registration against the Qualified Voter File (QVF) prior to filing. To obtain a copy of the QVF, follow the instructions on the [Qualified Voter Data Request Form](#) found on the BOE website.

F. Geographic distribution of signatures

The petition must include the signatures of at least 100 registered voters from each of at least half of the congressional districts in the state. MCL 168.685(1). The submitted petitions should be sorted and grouped by congressional district.

G. Non-resident petition circulators

Michigan election law authorizes the sponsors of new party petitions to hire petition circulators who are not Michigan residents, provided that the nonresident circulators agree to accept the jurisdiction of the state of Michigan and service of process upon the Secretary of State or her designated agent. A nonresident circulator must make a cross or check mark in the box provided on the petition sheet agreeing to these terms, "otherwise each signature on this petition sheet is invalid and the signatures will not be counted by a filing official." MCL 168.544c(1).

CERTIFICATE OF CIRCULATOR

The undersigned circulator of the above petition asserts that he or she is 18 years of age or older and a United States citizen; that each signature on the petition was signed in his or her presence; that he or she has neither caused nor permitted a person to sign the petition more than once and has no knowledge of a person signing the petition more than once; and that, to his or her best knowledge and belief, each signature is the genuine signature of the person purporting to sign the petition, the person signing the petition was at the time of signing a registered elector of the city or township indicated preceding the signature, and the elector was qualified to sign the petition.

If the circulator is not a resident of Michigan, the circulator shall make a cross or check mark in the box provided, otherwise each signature on this petition sheet is invalid and the signatures will not be counted by a filing official. By making a cross or check mark in the box provided, the undersigned circulator asserts that he or she is not a resident of Michigan and agrees to accept the jurisdiction of this state for the purpose of any legal proceeding or hearing that concerns a petition sheet executed by the circulator and agrees that legal process served on the Secretary of State or a designated agent of the Secretary of State has the same effect as if personally served on the circulator.



H. Circulation period

Signatures may be gathered for up to 180 days immediately preceding the date of filing. Signatures that are more than 180 days old on the date the petition is filed are not valid and will not be counted.

I. Filing deadline

To appear on the Nov. 5, 2024, General Election ballot, petitions must be submitted by July 18, 2024, at 4 p.m.

J. Filing location

The filing location is: Michigan Secretary of State, Bureau of Elections, Richard H. Austin Building, 430 West Allegan Street, 1st Floor, Lansing, Michigan 48918. Sponsors must contact BOE at 517-335-3234 or email at MDOS-File-Canvass@Michigan.gov to plan for the submission of the petition well in advance of the date of filing.

At the time of filing, the sponsor must submit a certificate signed by the chairperson and secretary of the party's state central committee indicating the party's name.

Once signed petition forms are submitted, additional signatures cannot be added to the filing. MCL 168.685(2). In addition, sponsors will be asked to provide the estimated number of petition sheets and signatures submitted. Please refer to the Petition Signature Guidance section of Appendix B for additional information.



III. Governing Provisions of Michigan Election Law

The provisions of Michigan election law governing ballot access by new political parties follow below:

[MCL 168.532](#)

[MCL 168.534](#)

[MCL 168.544c](#)

[MCL 168.560a](#)

[MCL 168.685](#)

[MCL 168.686](#)

[MCL 168.686a](#)

[MCL 168.686b](#)

[MCL 168.687](#)

[MCL 168.692a](#)

The compiled Michigan Election Law can also be accessed through the Michigan Legislature website, legislature.mi.gov.



IV. Questions

If you have any questions, please contact the Michigan Department of State, Bureau of Elections at:

Mailing address: P.O. Box 20126, Lansing, MI 48901-0726

Address for overnight or hand delivery:

Richard H. Austin Bldg.
430 W. Allegan, 1st Floor
Lansing, MI 48918

Phone: (517) 335-3234

Email: MDOS-File-Canvass@Michigan.gov



Appendix A: Completing Petition to Form a New Political Party

Form use: All mandatory elements on the petition sheet must be visible and undamaged, otherwise the petition sheet will be rejected.

Petition heading: A petition sheet must include the name of the county where it was circulated; each sheet must list only a single county. (Example: Wayne)

Party name: The Party name must be clearly presented. This name will remain the party name and cannot be changed without circulating new petitions.

Signer's signature: Signature should match QVF entry. 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, or 3. Registered to vote in the city or township indicated but that jurisdiction is not within the county listed in the heading of the petition sheet.

Signer's name: Signer should clearly write their first and last name.

Street address or rural route: Signer must include the house number and name of their street.

City or township: Signer must write the name of the city or township in which their residence is located. Do not write both the county and the city/township.

ZIP code: Signer should write the five-digit ZIP code associated with their residential address.

Date: Signer must write the day, month, and year that they signed the circulated petition sheet.

Circulator block: A circulator section 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.



Appendix B: Procedure for Evaluating Petitions

A: Validation of signatures by random sampling; challenge

Procedure

In 1980, the Board of State Canvassers adopted a petition sampling procedure to evaluate the validity of ballot signatures. That process was reaffirmed in 1990. In 2022, the Bureau of Elections (BOE) hired an outside firm to review the 1980 procedure, including the statistical methods and processes. That review found that the sampling process continues to be sound, but several changes could be made to improve efficiency and accuracy. The improvements recommended in the report are included in this manual, as well as the document: [Sampling Procedure for Canvassing Petitions](#). The random sampling process has also been implemented for statewide nominating and qualifying candidate petitions.

Sampling

To canvass a petition, BOE staff use a single-step random sampling process. The selection of random signatures is completed using specially designed software. The sample list is distributed for challenges pursuant to legal deadlines. The sample is made available in paper and electronically for Freedom of Information Act requests.

The sampled sheets are face reviewed to determine if a circulator error or problem with the sheet invalidates the entire sheet of signatures. Sample signatures on invalid sheets are considered invalid signatures.

Each sampled signature on valid sheets is then examined to confirm that the signatory is a person registered to vote in Michigan, that the signature on the petition sheet matches the signature contained in the Qualified Voter File (QVF), and that the entry does not contain a fatal defect.

Signatures found to be invalid are reviewed a second time by another BOE staff member. Signatures challenged during the challenge period are reviewed by BOE staff.

Staff tally the number of valid/invalid sheets and valid/invalid signatures in the sample. A staff report is drafted for the Board of State Canvassers with



statistical analysis and makes a recommendation whether to approve or deny the petition for placement on the ballot.

B: 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 of circulation is omitted.
- Two or more counties or a county not located in Michigan are listed.
- Required information concerning the candidate or office sought is omitted, including the candidate's name, residence address, party affiliation or indication of no party affiliation, 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 that is printed on the reverse side of the Nominating Petition (Countywide Nonpartisan) 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.

Note: The petition sheet is invalid if the circulator merely prints his or her name and fails to sign the petition.

- The circulator's residence address is omitted, incomplete or includes a P.O. Box in place of a street address or rural route.



- 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.

Note: The circulator’s failure to include the correct ZIP code, by itself, is **not** a fatal defect.

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, signer entries) are illegible or omitted.
- Sheets where any of the mandatory elements (heading, warning statements, circulator certificate, signer entries) 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:

- 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.”
- The circulator’s signature is illegible.
- The circulator prints their name in space provided for the signature and signs in the space for printed name.
- The circulator omits their printed name.
- The circulator enters their cursive signature in space provided for printed name.
- The circulator omits their ZIP code or enters an incorrect ZIP code.
- An out-of-state 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.



C: Validity of individual signatures

A signature entry is valid if the voter signs the petition and prints his or her street address or rural route, city or township where registered to vote, 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. The codes used to mark defects and omissions on petition sheets are shown in Appendix H of the [Petition Manual: Statewide Initiative, Referendum, Constitutional Amendment Petitions, Partisan Nominating, and Petitions for State and Federal Office](#).

Acceptable signature entries

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.¹
- All of the following variations are acceptable: The signer prints his or her name in space provided for the 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.

Note: A signature is invalid if the signer merely prints his or her name in the space provided for printed name yet 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, city or township, 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.

¹ Note, however, that if *all* of 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.



- The signer writes the community’s name appearing in his or her “postal address”² in the space for city or township of registration.
- The signer omits his or her ZIP code or enters an incorrect ZIP code.
- The signer writes the name of a village or unincorporated place in the space for city or township of registration.

Example 1: Individuals who are registered to vote in Genesee Township, Richfield Township, and Vienna Township have a Mt. Morris postal address. When signing a countywide petition, these voters may write the name of the township where they are registered to vote or Mt. Morris in the “City or Township” column of the petition sheet, and either entry is valid.

Example 2: Parts of Texas Township are served by the Kalamazoo post office (ZIP code 49001) while other parts of the township are served by the Mattawan post office (ZIP code 49071). If a Texas Township registrant writes “Kalamazoo” in the city or township column but his or her postal address is Mattawan, the entry is invalid.

Example 3: A signature is valid if the signer provides the name of an unincorporated place in the place for city or township of registration, and the signer is registered to vote in the township containing that unincorporated place. Examples of unincorporated places include but are not limited to: Hemlock (Saginaw County), Kincheloe (Chippewa County), Lambertville (Monroe County), Okemos (Ingham County), Union Lake (Oakland County), and Walloon Lake (Charlevoix County).

D: Jurisdiction name variations

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.

E: 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

² The term “postal address” refers to the name of the local post office. In some instances, the post office name will correspond to the name of the person’s city or township, but in other cases, the post office name differs. As a result, the jurisdiction written on the petition may not always correspond to the name of the city or township where the signer is registered to vote. See usps.com for a list of local post offices by state.







duties beginning 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 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 significantly and obviously differs from the signature on file; see Examples 6-8 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: <i>John Hancock</i> vs 	Questionable signature
8.	 vs. 	Questionable signature



Appendix C: Printer's Affidavit

The sponsors of new political party petitions are urged to submit a proof copy of their petition to the Board of State Canvassers for approval as to form prior to the circulation of the petition. When submitting a petition form for approval, the Board requires that this affidavit be attached.

PRINTER'S AFFIDAVIT

I, _____, being duly sworn, depose and say:

1. That I prepared the attached petition proof.
2. That the size of the petition is 8.5 inches by 13 inches.
3. That the words, "PETITION TO FORM A NEW POLITICAL PARTY" and the name of the proposed party are printed in 24-point boldface type.
4. That the words, "We, the undersigned, duly registered electors . . ." are printed in 8-point type.
5. That the two warning statements and language contained therein are printed in 12-point boldface type.
6. That the words, "CIRCULATOR – Do not sign or date . . ." are printed in 12-point boldface type.
7. That the balance of the petition is printed in 8-point type.
8. That the font used in the petition is _____.
9. That to the best of my knowledge and belief, the petition conforms to the petition form standards prescribed by Michigan election law.

Printer's signature

Name of proposed political party

Notary Public, State of Michigan, County of _____.
Acting in the County of _____ (where required).
My commission expires _____.

Subscribed and sworn to (or affirmed) before me on this ____ day of _____, 20____,
by _____.
Name of affiant

Signature of notary public

Name of notary public



Appendix D: Sample Petition

PETITION TO FORM NEW POLITICAL PARTY

We, the undersigned, duly registered electors of the county of _____ state of Michigan, residing at the places set opposite our names, respectfully request the secretary of state, in accordance with

section 685 of the Michigan election law, 1954 PA 115, MCL 168.685, to place the names of the candidates of the _____ party on the ballot at the _____ election.

Warning: A person who knowingly signs petitions to organize more than 1 new state political party, signs a petition to organize a new state political party more than once, or signs a name other than his or her own is violating the provisions of the Michigan election law.

	SIGNATURE	PRINTED NAME	STREET ADDRESS OR RURAL ROUTE	CITY OR TOWNSHIP	ZIP CODE	DATE OF SIGNING		
						MONTH	DAY	YEAR
1.								
2.								
3.								
4.								
5.								
6.								
7.								
8.								
9.								
10.								
11.								
12.								

SAMPLE

Circulator – Do not sign or date certificate until after circulating petition.

CERTIFICATE OF CIRCULATOR

The undersigned circulator of the above petition asserts that he or she is 18 years of age or older and a United States citizen; that each signature on the petition was signed in his or her presence; that he or she has neither caused nor permitted a person to sign the petition more than once and has no knowledge of a person signing the petition more than once, and that, to his or her best knowledge and belief, each signature is the genuine signature of the person purporting to sign the petition, the person signing the petition was at the time of signing a registered elector of the city or township listed in the heading of the petition, and the elector was qualified to sign the petition.

If the circulator is not a resident of Michigan, the circulator shall make a cross or check mark in the box provided, otherwise each signature on this petition sheet is invalid and the signatures will not be counted by a filing official. By making a cross or check mark in the box provided, the undersigned circulator asserts that he or she is not a resident of Michigan and agrees to accept the jurisdiction of this state for the purpose of any legal proceeding or hearing that concerns a petition sheet executed by the circulator and agrees that legal process served on the secretary of state or a designated agent of the secretary of state has the same effect as if personally served on the circulator.

Warning – A circulator knowingly making a false statement in the above certificate, a person not a circulator who signs as a circulator, or a person who signs a name other than his or her own as circulator is guilty of a misdemeanor.

"Paid for with funds by The Party Party – 2284 S. 25th St. City, MI 48444."

(Signature of Circulator) _____ / / Date

(Printed Name of Circulator) _____

(Complete Residence Address – (Street and Number or Rural Route)) Do not enter a post office box _____

(City or Township, State, Zip Code) _____

(County of Registration, if Registered to Vote, of a Circulator who is not a Resident of Michigan) _____

"Not authorized by any candidate or candidate committee."

