



ALEX PADILLA | SECRETARY OF STATE | STATE OF CALIFORNIA
ELECTIONS DIVISION

1500 11th Street, 5th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814 | Tel 916.657.2166 | Fax 916.653.3214 | www.sos.ca.gov

July 14, 2020

County Clerk/Registrar of Voters (CC/ROV) Memorandum #20151

TO: All County Clerks/Registrars of Voters

FROM: /s/ Jana M. Lean
Chief, Elections Division

RE: General Election: Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMb) on Vote-by-mail Ballot Envelopes

In order to address COVID-19 in light of the upcoming November 3, 2020, General Election, Governor Newsom issued Executive Orders [N-64-20](#) and [N-67-20](#); and the state legislature passed [Assembly Bill 860](#). Additionally, [Senate Bill 423](#), which relates to in-person voting opportunities, is under consideration by the California Legislature. Executive Order [N-67-20](#) provides that all county elections officials are required to use Intelligent Mail barcodes (IMb) on vote-by-mail ballot envelopes.

The use of intelligent mail barcode technology is essential to increase accountability and transparency for the entire vote-by-mail ballot process. The IMb is a 65-bar United States Postal Service™ (USPS) barcode that is used by the USPS to sort and track mail. A single barcode allows users to participate in multiple Postal Service programs, track individual mail pieces, and have greater visibility to the mail piece through its journey in the mail stream.

For vote-by-mail ballots, there are different types of IMb used on envelopes: outbound IMb, inbound IMb, serialized (unique ballot level) outbound IMb and serialized (unique ballot level) inbound IMb. The IMb is printed on the vote-by-mail envelope and is typically printed by a county's mail vendor or printer. Any envelope printed with an IMb can be traced through the mail stream process, however, only a serialized IMb can identify a specific voter's ballot.

IMb offer benefits for county elections officials and for voters. For county elections officials, first, IMb integrate with the USPS service that keeps an updated list of mail that is returned to the post office. County elections officials can access this list online and use it to update their own mailing lists. This helps them ensure their mailings make it to mailboxes. It also saves county elections officials from wasting money sending undeliverable mail. Second, IMb tell county elections officials the last USPS location where a pallet of mail was scanned, thereby giving them visibility into where the vote-

by-mail ballots are in the mail stream. Third, using IMb on ballot envelopes differentiates ballots from other types of mail within the USPS' internal tracking system. Fourth, with the use of serialized unique ballot specific IMb, the county elections official can proactively monitor ballots that are traveling through the mail stream and analyze data about ballot delivery and delays. And finally, IMb can be used to determine timeliness, as an alternative to the postmark; the return ballot can be traced to its entry in the mail system, allowing determinations of timeliness.

For the voter, the use of serialized unique ballot specific IMb can offer the voter greater visibility into both the sending of their vote-by-mail ballot by the county elections official as well as the return of the ballot by the voter, if the voter chooses to return their ballot through the mail stream.

IMb cost more in printing and personnel time to set up. However, the visibility benefit for county elections officials and voters enables county elections officials to provide higher levels of customer service at a reduced overall administrative cost while also enhancing security.

For California counties, a certified ballot printer must be used to print ballots, and many counties use these certified printers to also print vote-by-mail envelopes and mail the vote-by-mail ballots.

The printing of outbound/inbound IMb and serialized outbound/inbound IMb requires software, hardware, process and procedures, which varies from print vendor and by county. The Secretary of State has engaged with county elections officials and print vendors to understand vendor and county election official abilities and limitations related to the use of IMb.

Based upon conversations with California county elections officials and certified print vendors, the Secretary of State provides the following best practices and guidance:

Generally

All county elections officials are encouraged to send vote-by-mail ballots using a First-Class Postage Rate when mailing all vote-by-mail ballots. First-Class Postage Rate is the fastest option, delivering mail within 2-3 days locally. Beginning E-15, using a First-Class Postage Rate is strongly encouraged to ensure the vote-by-mail ballots are delivered in sufficient time for the voter to receive and return their vote-by-mail ballot.

Counties are encouraged to process the check-in of received vote-by-mail envelopes within 24 hours of receipt and upload to VoteCal in near real time.

As part of the monthly reports to the Secretary of State, each county shall submit their plan for processing supplemental mailings, including such things as how often supplementals will be sent, the postage rate to be used, whether serialized tracking will be used, etc.

Additional costs incurred related to the printing and use of IMb for November will be qualified reimbursable costs under the funding provided for COVID related election costs.

Initial and Supplemental Mailing by the Print Vendor

To the extent feasible, all county elections officials using a print vendor are required to use serialized IMb:

- on all outgoing vote-by-mail envelopes;
- on inbound voted vote-by-mail ballot envelopes sent in the initial vote-by-mail mailing and any supplemental mailings coordinated with a print vendor through E-7.

If a print vendor is unable to support either of these functions, the vendor shall provide in writing by August 3, 2020, to the Secretary of State an explanation of why they cannot support the type of IMb mailing, which county(ies) are affected, what steps they are taking in the alternative, and their plans, if any, to support the function in the future.

Initial and Supplemental Mailing by the County

A county that generates and mails their initial or supplemental mailings and does not utilize a print vendor, is encouraged, but not required to utilize outbound and inbound IMb.

If a county is interested, there are software and hardware options that are available that can print outbound and inbound IMb in the county office. Any implementation of one of these software and hardware options should include sufficient testing, training, and quality assurance processes.

Over-the-Counter Ballots Issued by the County

Vote-by-mail ballots issued in-person, over-the-counter, by the county elections officials are not required to have outbound or inbound IMb.

However, counties are encouraged to provide information to advise the voter on how to sign up for ballot tracking, what to expect from ballot tracking, and how to return their ballot via drop-off locations, if the voter does not vote and return the ballot at that time.

CCROV #20151

July 14, 2020

Page 4

Existing Envelope Stock

To the extent county elections officials have already ordered and purchased envelope stock, additional envelope stock shall be purchased by the county to ensure that initial mailings contain outbound IMb, inbound IMb, serialized outbound IMb, or serialized inbound IMb as described above. Counties can use existing envelope stock for over-the-counter issued ballots, county issued supplementals, back-up stock, or for future elections.

Should you have any questions regarding this document or need any assistance, please contact Ryan Reece at (916) 695-1560 or rreece@sos.ca.gov.

Thank you.