

Write-in Votes For Punchscan

Ben Hosp
George Washington University - CS Dept.
Washington DC 20052
bhosp@gwu.edu

February 5, 2007

In order to vote write-in, a voter will first mark a vote for a candidate named “write-in” on his Punchscan ballot, just as he might while using another balloting system. The voter should not simply write the name of his candidate directly on his ballot, since this would violate the involuntary privacy principle, sometimes referred to as ballot secrecy. Instead, the voter casts his ballot (with the vote for “write-in”) as usual, and then fills out a separate form where he writes, in the corresponding spaces provided, his chosen candidate, ballot ID number, and contest number. He then seals this form into an ordinary windowed mailing envelope, so that the ballot ID number and contest number are visible through the window, but the candidate name is not.

The write-in votes are counted as follows: the election authorities will check that each write-in ballot is actually associated with a vote for “write-in” in the specified contest on the specified ballot. Any other write-in ballots are invalid and will be set aside. The authorities will then make public the list of valid write-in ballots which they intend to count. If a voter holds a valid receipt for a vote for “write-in” which is not on this list, he will have an appropriate period to make a challenge.

Assuming there are no such challenges, the election authorities will, in public, cut the envelopes down the middle, so that the written votes are separated from the ballot ID numbers. (Stacks of envelopes that are oriented the same way could be cut at once on a commercial paper cutter.) The envelope-halves that contain votes are then physically shuffled, opened, and counted. (The other halves, with the serial numbers and contest numbers have already been posted during the challenge period.)