

**We take election integrity seriously. Public confidence is essential to elections.**

- The Missoula County Elections Office follows policies and procedures designed to protect the integrity of the election and taken additional steps to instill confidence.
  - We provide the public access to observe all steps of ballot processing, not just those specifically mentioned in state law.
  - We publicly notice all public testing, early prep, counting and canvass meetings.
  - During the 2020 general election, we chose to live-stream video of the counting center to allow for additional transparency during COVID, making Missoula County on the cutting edge for access to observe our processes.
  - Throughout the records request, we responded promptly and diligently to all requests that were legally permissible.
  - We have worked directly with the requestor and public to help educate them on the policies and procedures followed and why they can feel confident in the work Missoula County does, all counties across the state, and the work certifying these results at both the State and County level.

**We wanted to specifically address recent claims made about the 2020 federal election, as they are not accurate, and these inaccuracies can be damaging to public confidence in the process.**

**CLAIM:** 4,592 affirmation envelopes were missing

**FACT:** Rep. Tschida's group that reviewed the affirmation envelopes hand-counted them one time, with no process in place to double-check and verify that their count was accurate. When notified that their total was incorrect, they chose not to count them again or pursue another way to verify accuracy. Their total also does not take into account the hundreds of restricted envelopes and electronically submitted ballots from overseas voters, which do not have affirmation envelopes.

Conversely, when the Missoula County Elections Office receives mail ballots during an election, staff begin a multi-step procedure to confirm the voter to whom a ballot was issued is the person who voted it. This includes verifying that the signature on the affirmation envelope matches the signature on file and contacting the voter if it does not. It also includes scanning the unique barcode on each affirmation envelope into the Montana Secretary of State's voter database, and then comparing those envelopes to a report generated by that database to verify that each envelope listed as "accepted" is also physically present.

These are just two of several steps elections staff take to accurately account for affirmation envelopes received and to accurately tabulate the ballots they contain. Voters can review a more detailed outline of the process at [missoula.co/electionintegrity](https://missoula.co/electionintegrity).

**CLAIM:** Elections staff were responsible for the procedures used during the records review

**FACT:** Elections staff supervised the physical records during the review to ensure they did not leave the building, but they did not instruct the reviewers on their process. When the reviewers came unprepared, staff did provide them with pens and paper.

**CLAIM:** Video recordings must be made of the initial opening of ballots and recount

**FACT:** No such requirement exists. Missoula County streamed video of the vote counting center to enable transparency for the public amid space limitations due to COVID.

Missoula County's video was not "missing." Missoula County followed both our own retention policy, as well as the state's: The state requires video retention for 30 days, and the county's policy is to retain video for no more than 60 days to conserve server bandwidth. The video was automatically destroyed after being retained for 30 days, meeting both the county and state retention policies. The request for video occurred after this 30-day time frame. Lott and Rhoades also fail to understand the records retention policy from the state and county.

**CLAIM:** 55 envelopes did not have dates

**FACT:** In his original post, the author is referring to postmarks. Montana law does not require envelopes to have postmarks on them for the ballot inside to be counted. Thousands of voters drop off their ballots in person, and none of their affirmation envelopes would have postmarks. This calls into question their basic understanding of the process and the accuracy of their allegations, and it underscores their intent to mislead voters with confusing information.

**CLAIM:** 53 envelopes did not have signatures checked

**FACT:** When verifying signatures, staff mark the signature on the envelope with a red line. This is to assist staff in tracking which envelopes have been verified in the Secretary of State database and which have not yet been verified in the database. Occasionally, this step is missed due to human error, which is what this claim refers to. That is why we include multiple double-checks in the process, which, again, is something the record reviewers chose not to do. After a batch of signatures are verified, a manager prints a report that lists all envelopes in that batch whose signatures were verified in the SOS database. Two staff, working in teams, use the report to physically confirm that each envelope had its signature verified and was processed in the SOS database. The envelopes are highlighted as this confirmation process is completed. We do not instruct staff to add the red pen line if this step was missed by the previous staff member.

**CLAIM:** 28 affirmation envelopes were from the same address and appeared to have the same signature

**FACT:** Staff worked with the records reviewers to set aside the aforementioned envelopes they had questions about during the review, but the group did not flag these 28 envelopes. If they had brought this to staff's attention, staff would have set those aside for review as well. The reviewers had the option to photocopy any envelopes, omitting the signature to protect voter privacy, for their records. They chose not to complete either of those processes. It's also worth noting that when elections staff verify signatures, they do so by comparing the signature on the affirmation envelope to the signatures on file for that voter, not by comparing them to signatures on other envelopes.