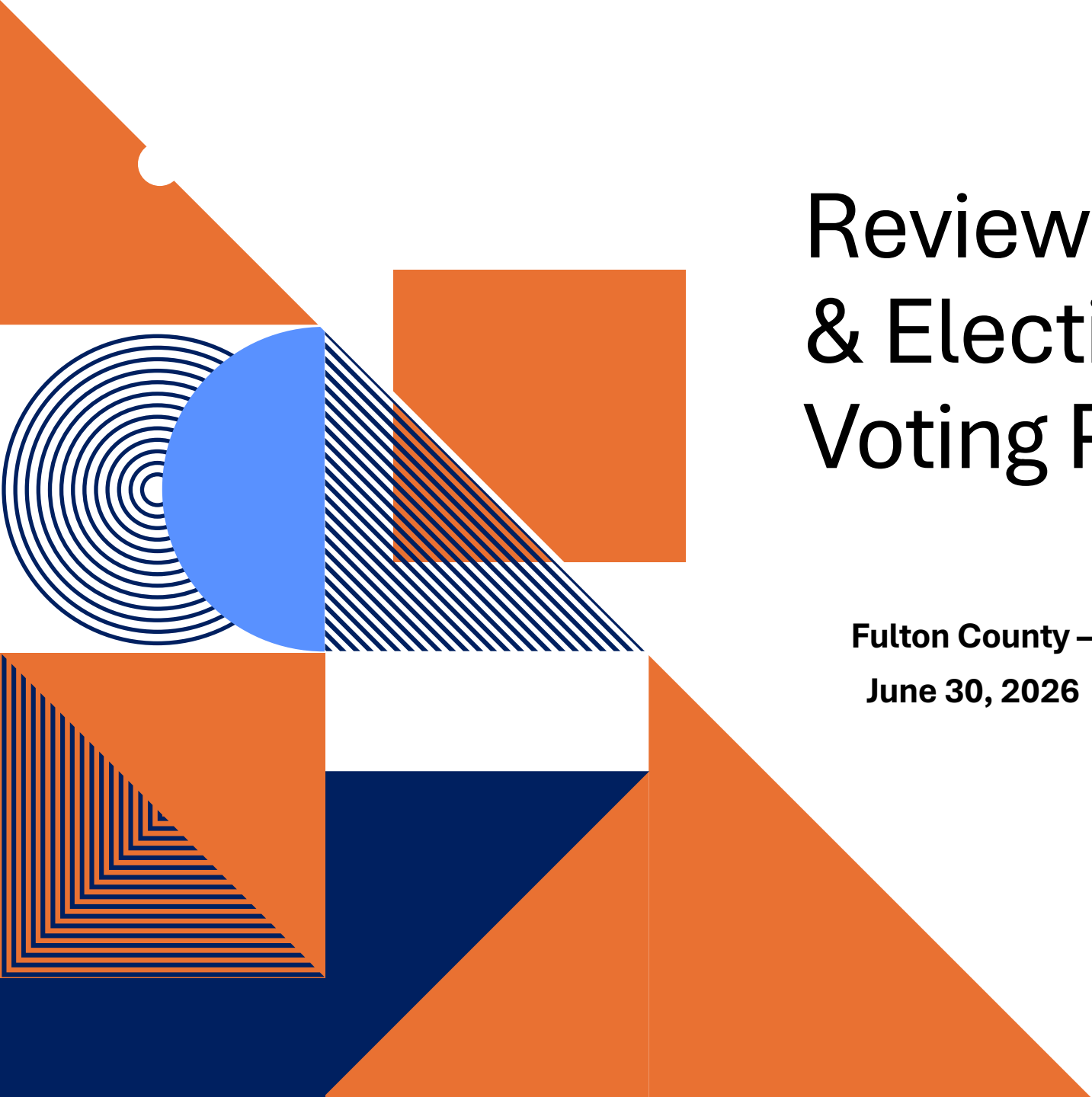




# Review of the Registration & Elections Absentee Voting Process

**Fulton County – Office of the County Auditor**  
**June 30, 2026**



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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





# ENGAGEMENT SCOPE

- Objective: To assess the absentee voting process and determine whether internal controls are operating efficiently and effectively.
- Scope: Review the absentee voting processes during April and May 2026, including onsite observations of the processes associated with the May 19, 2026, General Election of Fulton County, Georgia.



# BACKGROUND

Purpose: To observe the preparation, mail out, receipt, opening, and processing of absentee ballots for the May 19, 2026, General Election for Fulton County, Georgia. Additionally, to determine whether controls are operating efficiently and effectively.



# PROCEDURE

The Office of the County Auditor notified the Department of Registration and Elections of an on-site observation of the absentee ballot process to be conducted on Thursday, April 30, 2026, and an observation of the processing of ballots on Thursday, May 14, 2026. We obtained the Absentee by Mail Standard Operating Procedures from the Registration and Elections Director to become familiar with the processes and to plan steps for the observation.

The observation took place at the Registration and Elections (R&E) HUB in the absentee office area, the mailroom, and other areas designated for ballot processing.

## 2. ABSENTEE APPLICATION ACCEPTANCE PHASE



# ABSENTEE APPLICATION ACCEPTANCE PROCESS

## Step 1: Application Received

### Pathways:

- Mail
- Walk-in
- Email
- GARViS (Voter Information System)
- Advance Voting Locations (*PILOT Program*)

## Step 2: Application Verification

Application is reviewed to ensure the following:

- Name mirrors GARViS records
- Date of birth verified
- Driver's License or acceptable Identification verified
- Original pen or ink signature present
- Mailing address confirmed

**Observation:** We observed Absentee Processing Clerks review, verify, and process applications in GARViS. Once processed and accepted, printed applications were placed in a “processed bin” for Quality Assurance (Q&A) and accuracy. If information is missing from an application, it is forwarded to Q&A, and a provisional ballot letter is sent to the voter identifying the missing information. The voter is then allowed to submit the missing information.

**Recommendation:** None



# MAIL

**Description:** Ballot applications received by mail are delivered to the receptionist and placed in a sealed ballot box located in the front office area. The ballot box is retrieved once daily by two election couriers and taken to the mail room where the envelopes are opened, applications removed, date/time stamped on each page, stamped “received by mail”, recorded on the Daily Count Sheet and the envelopes are maintained.

**Observation:** We observed two election couriers retrieve ballots from the sealed ballot box (dual control). The ballots were then placed in a sealed bag and transported to the mailroom for processing and acceptance.

**Recommendation:** None



# WALK-IN

**Description:** Absentee ballot applications are accepted by the Election's staff at the R&E Hub walk-up windows. A signed affidavit must be completed for each walk-in ballot submitted, attesting the individual's identity and the authorization to vote.

**Observation:** At the time of our visit, we did not observe any walk-in ballots.

**Recommendation:** None



# EMAIL

**Description:** Absentee ballot applications are accepted via email using the [elections.absentee@fultoncountyga.gov](mailto:elections.absentee@fultoncountyga.gov) email address and printed. Emails are date/time stamped, stamped “Received by EMAIL”, logged on the “Daily Count Log of applications,” then placed in the Pre-Sort area.

**Observation:** At the time of our visit, no emails were retrieved; however, we reviewed the Daily Count Log Sheet, which displays the number of applications received by date through various methods, including email.

We also note that an Absentee Processing Clerk is designated to monitor the incoming absentee ballot emails; however, all Absentee Division staff have access to the email account and may respond to inquiries.

**Recommendation:** None



# GARVIS

**Description:** Absentee ballot applications are completed and accepted via the Secretary of State (SOS) Online Voter Registration portal. Absentee Specialists access the applications submitted via the portal by logging in to the Georgia Registered Voter Information System (GARViS). Applications are printed for the record, date-stamped, and logged on the “Daily Count Log of Applications”.

**Observation:** During our visit, we reviewed the Daily Count Log of Applications received and noted applications received through GARViS.

**Recommendation:** None



# ADVANCE VOTING LOCATIONS

**Description:** There are seven (7) Advance in Person (AIP) voting locations that have an absentee ballot drop box and four (4) locations with a registrar's Office.

After the polls close, each precinct verifies the number of ballots received, records the totals on the Chain of Custody Form, and seals the container. The election courier then verifies the information and transports ballots to the R&E Hub.

**Observation:** We were provided with Standard Operating Procedures for Return of Absentee by Mail Ballots at Advance Voting Locations, although we did not observe this process.

**Recommendation:** None





# PREPARATION FOR MAILING ABSENTEE BALLOTS

**Description:** Absentee ballot applications can be requested via the Fulton County website or downloaded from the Secretary of State Website. The absentee ballots are to be prepared for mailing no more than 29 days, and no later than 25 days before an election, per O.C.G.A 21-2-384. Furthermore, the application is agreed to the GARViS voter information system; address, name, license or ID, and signature must be verified. If the information does not agree, a voter registration application should be completed. If it is not completed, the voter is sent a provisional ballot that must be cured. To prepare the ballots for mailing, the Absentee Voter Report is retrieved from GARViS. This report includes individuals who have applied and requested an absentee ballot, including the voter's mailing address, precinct, and party.

We were informed that the R&E Department no longer mails the absentee ballots; this process is handled by a third-party vendor through a Statewide contract. The Absentee Manager uploads the Absentee Voter Report file to the vendor nightly, and the vendor confirms receipt. The vendor then mails out the ballots to the voters on the list. The Absentee Manager can track the mailing status of each ballot and monitor when it has been delivered to the post office.

**Observation:** We were unable to observe the mailing of the ballots by the third-party vendor. However, we observed the Absentee Manager log into GARViS, retrieve the Absentee Voter Report for the May 19, 2026, election, and accept the report for applications accepted on April 30, 2026. The report was filtered by application status "Accepted" and further filtered to display only "Absentee by Mail voters". UOCAVA or military ballots that were excluded, as those were previously mailed. The report was then filtered by political party to show democratic and republican ballots, which is used to ensure the correct ballot is mailed to each voter. The total number of ballot requests was summarized by precinct and political party. A total of 100 ballots were scheduled to be mailed on May 1, 2026.

**Recommendation:** We recommend updating the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to reflect the revised processes for mailing ballots through the third-party vendor. Additionally, implement oversight controls to monitor vendor performance and ensure compliance with applicable election laws, regulations, and contract requirements.



# STUFFING OF ENVELOPES

**Description:** The stuffing of envelopes is performed primarily by the third-party vendor.

There are a few instances in which the R&E Department mails out absentee ballots. Therefore, a limited number of ballots are ordered and maintained in a locked file cabinet in the mail room located inside the Elections Hub.

**Note:** The mailroom is a segregated area enclosed by a chain link fence. The mailroom is locked and accessible by authorized personnel with a key card only. Three election employees must be present in the mailroom (whenever ballots are present) in accordance with Election Code 21-2-386 (2)(A).

**Observation:** During our visit, we did not observe any ballots mailed directly by the R&E Department. However, we did observe ballots stored in a locked file cabinet in the mailroom.

**Recommendation:** None





# VERIFICATION OF MAILING ENVELOPES

**Description:** The absentee voters listed on the Absentee Voter Report are matched to the mailing envelopes to ensure an envelope is prepared for each voter who has requested a mailed ballot. This process includes verification of ballot style and party, and the inclusion of a Return Oath envelope. This process is primarily performed by the third-party vendor.

**Observation:** During our visit, we did not observe the verification process matching the Absentee Voter Report to the mailing envelopes, as this activity was performed by a third-party vendor.

**Recommendation:** We recommend obtaining and documenting the specific verification procedures performed by the third-party vendor to ensure accuracy and completeness of mailing activities.



# VERIFICATION OF BALLOTS

**Description:** The verification process consists of verifying that the correct ballot is in the mailing envelope; name, address, precinct, and the type of ballot (Republican or Democrat). The verification process takes place in the mailroom, and the staff are paired in twos. As noted previously, there are a few instances in which the Registration and Elections Department mails out absentee ballots, although this process is primarily performed by a third-party vendor.

The first mail-out occurred on April 20, 2026, and the last day to request a ballot was May 8, 2026, for the May 19, 2026, election. This election is a General Primary Nonpartisan Election.

**Observation:** No ballots were prepared for mailing by the R&E Department during our visit.

**Recommendation:** We recommend updating SOPs to include the revised processes for the verification of ballots by a third-party vendor. Additionally, we recommend implementing oversight controls to ensure the required verification procedures are consistently performed by the third-party and to ensure compliance with applicable election laws and regulations.



# COUNTING OF THE BALLOTS

**Description:** Once the Absentee Ballots are verified, the sealed ballots are reconciled to the manifest. The mail courier processes the ballots through the counter and agrees the ballot count to the manifest count. This process is primarily performed by a third-party vendor.

**Observation:** During our visit, there were no ballots prepared for mailing directly by the R&E Department.

**Recommendation:** We recommend updating SOPs to include the use of a third-party vendor for the ballot counting and mailing process. We also recommend obtaining reconciliation and verification procedures performed by the vendor and implementing oversight and monitoring controls to ensure accuracy.



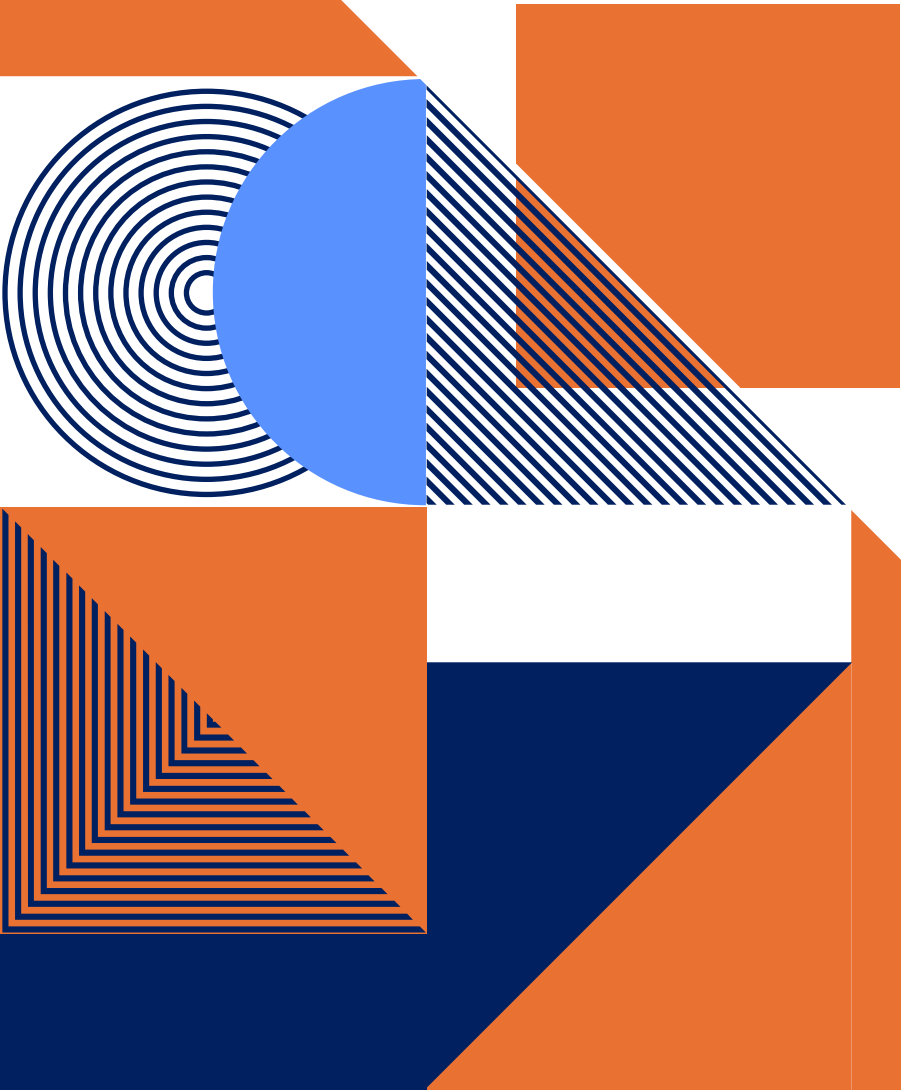
# SAFEKEEPING OF THE BALLOTS

**Description:** When ballots are mailed directly by the R&E Department, all envelopes are verified before the mail bins are placed in the locked file cabinets and secured by the Mail Courier until mailing. The ballots are then sealed by the Mail Couriers, secured and locked in the ballot boxes, and transported to the Fulton County Government Center for mailing.

**Observation:** We did not observe any ballots that were prepared for mailing by the R&E Department, as this activity is primarily performed by a third-party vendor.

**Recommendation:** We recommend updating SOPs to reflect the processes for the safekeeping and transporting of ballots by a third-party vendor. This should document the vendor's responsibilities and the department's monitoring controls to ensure the security and integrity of the ballots.

## 4. RECEIPT AND STORAGE OF BALLOTS



# VERIFICATION – RECEIPT AND STORAGE OF BALLOTS

**Description:** Absentee ballots are returned via dropbox, walk-in delivery, or mail. Ballots deposited in drop boxes or containers are obtained from each advanced voting location by the R&E Supply and Logistics Division. The ballots are transported to the Elections HUB and secured in a locked retention cage until the chain of custody is transferred to the mail courier. Absentee ballots received via walk-in delivery or mail are delivered to the front desk reception and placed in a sealed ballot box until retrieved by the R&E Mail Courier.

The Mail Courier takes possession of the ballots and stores them in a locked file cabinet in the mailroom located within the Elections Hub. The mailroom is a segregated area enclosed by a chain link fence. It is accessible only to authorized persons with a key card. As previously noted, there must be three (3) election employees within the mailroom (whenever ballots are present) per the election code. The mail courier cuts the seal from the ballot box and processes the ballots through the date and time stamp machine.

**Observation:** We observed two mail couriers retrieve ballots from the sealed ballot box located in the front office area. We also observed that access to the mailroom was restricted to authorized personnel and at least three (3) election employees were present in the mailroom while ballots were out. The ballots were processed through the date and time stamp machine, and the current date and time were stamped on each ballot.

**Recommendation:** None

# VERIFICATION – BALLOT ACCEPTANCE

**Description:** The Oath is opened on each ballot to ensure all required information is included to give credit to the elector. The Oath is reviewed for the following information:

- Signature and printed name
- Voter Identification (DL# or Identification Card #) **or**
- If no ID, include SS# **or**
- Selection marked to place another form of acceptable ID within the ballot envelope

**Observation:** We observed the Absentee Specialists sign into GARViS with a username and password with a 2-step verification process. The elector on the ballot was searched using the driver's license number listed on the ballot envelope; name and mailing address verified; ballot mail-out date reviewed; receipt date and time of returned ballot entered and performed by placing a check in the accepted box in the system. After ballots are accepted in the GARViS system, an Absentee Ballot Supervisor or Quality Assurance Specialist will verify that the accepted ballots have been marked accepted in the system, noted by "accepted" and the date.

We also observed the Absentee Officer verify a batch of absentee ballots that were designated as "accepted". No issues were found. Ballots were placed back in the designated tray and then placed in a tray by precinct in precinct order.

**Recommendation:** None

# VERIFICATION – BALLOT ACCEPTANCE, CONTINUED...

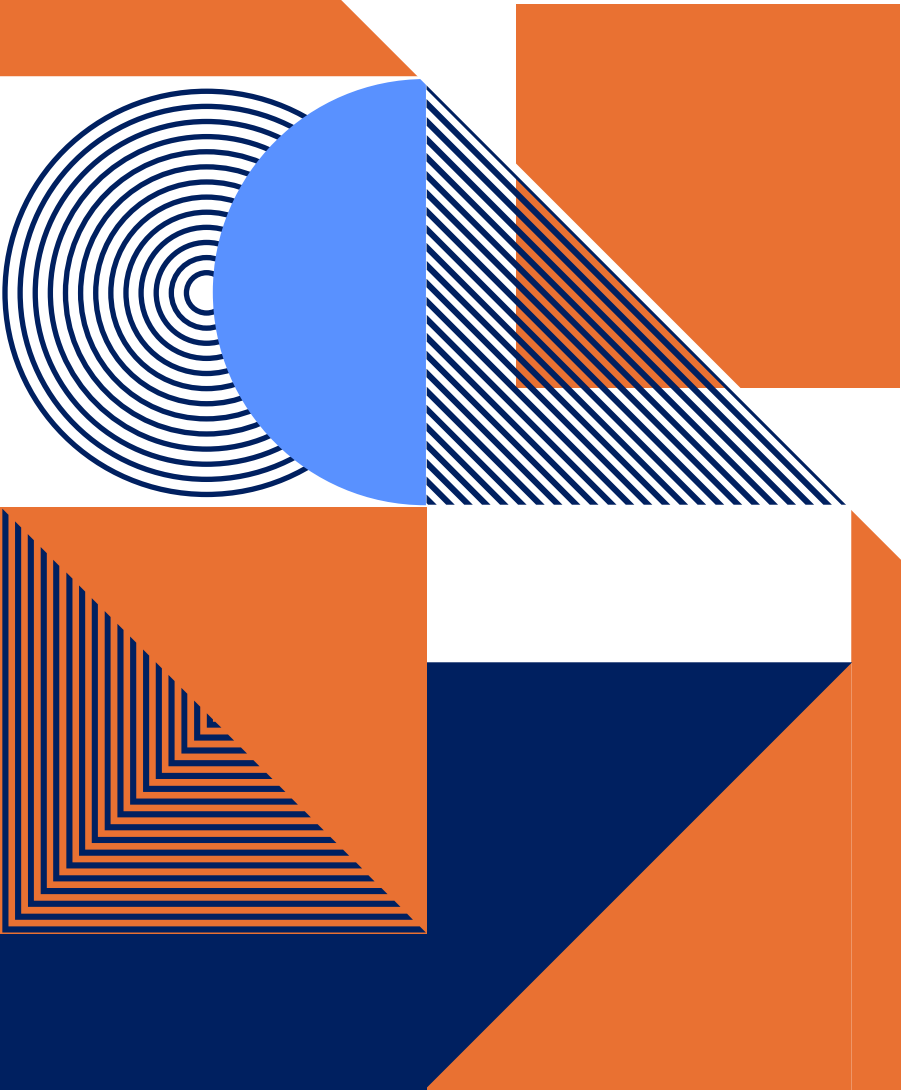
**Description:** Once the ballots are accepted, they are grouped into batches of no more than 50. This grouping is performed by a Mail Courier in the Absentee Division using the electronic sorter machine. A green batch sheet is placed with the batched ballots, which lists the precinct name, precinct number, and total number of ballots. The ballots are placed in a sealed cage, removed from the mail room, and rolled to the processing area. The Absentee Manager runs a report to show the total number of absentee ballots and compares the total to the physical ballot count.

**Observation:** We observed that the report total agreed with the total number of batched ballots without exception. The ballots were placed in a cage, sealed, and transported to the processing area by the Absentee staff. Once in the processing area, the seal was cut, and the seal number and ballot count were verified against the seal manifest

**Recommendation:** None



# 5. BALLOT EXTRACTION AND PROCESSING PHASE



# BALLOT EXTRACTION

**Description:** Ballots are opened manually or with a ballot extraction machine in an access-controlled processing area within the Elections Hub. The Absentee Specialist removes the white ballot envelope from the yellow outer envelope and places both envelopes in their designated bin or tray. The ballot is then removed from the white ballot envelope, and the total number of ballots extracted is reconciled to the batch total for verification and completeness.

**Observation:** We observed the extraction of ballots and noted that the total number of yellow envelopes matched the total number of white ballot envelopes. The yellow envelopes are retained with the ballots for additional information, if needed. We also observed ballots being extracted from the white ballot envelopes. The total number of extracted ballots was reconciled to the batch total, documented, and verified by two Absentee Specialists through signatures.

Note: Everything opened must be scanned by law.

**Recommendation:** None

# PREP STATION

**Description:** The Absentee Specialists unfold each ballot and review it for any tears, extra marks, or other issues that could prevent the ballot from being scanned and recorded. Ballots identified with potential issues are put aside for further review. These ballots may go through a voter review process to be resolved. One week before election day, this process is conducted by a Voter Review and Duplication Panel consisting of representatives from each political party. Each party is assigned a color vest and works with the opposing party during the review.

The purpose of the panel is to duplicate the ballot in order to scan it or to determine voter intent and duplicate the ballot in the system for scanning and recording. After the ballot is duplicated, the original ballot and the duplicate ballot are reviewed by the election staff to verify accuracy and confirm that the duplication reflects the decisions of both panel members. If any discrepancies are identified, the ballot is returned to the review panel.

**Observation:** During our visit, we observed three (3) Voter Review and Duplication Panels, each consisting of one republican member and one democratic member, identified by different colored vests. We observed the panelists performing their duties and noted a collaborative effort in determining elector intent. Once voter intent was established, the ballots were duplicated and printed. The duplicate ballots, along with the corresponding original ballots, were then provided to the election staff for review and verification. All sign-off and documentation steps were observed.

We also observed the review and verification of the duplicated ballots by a team of two Verification Clerks. The clerks compared the original ballot to the duplicated ballot for accuracy. Once verified, the duplicate ballot was prepared for scanning. No discrepancies were observed during our visit.

**Recommendation:** None



# SCANNING

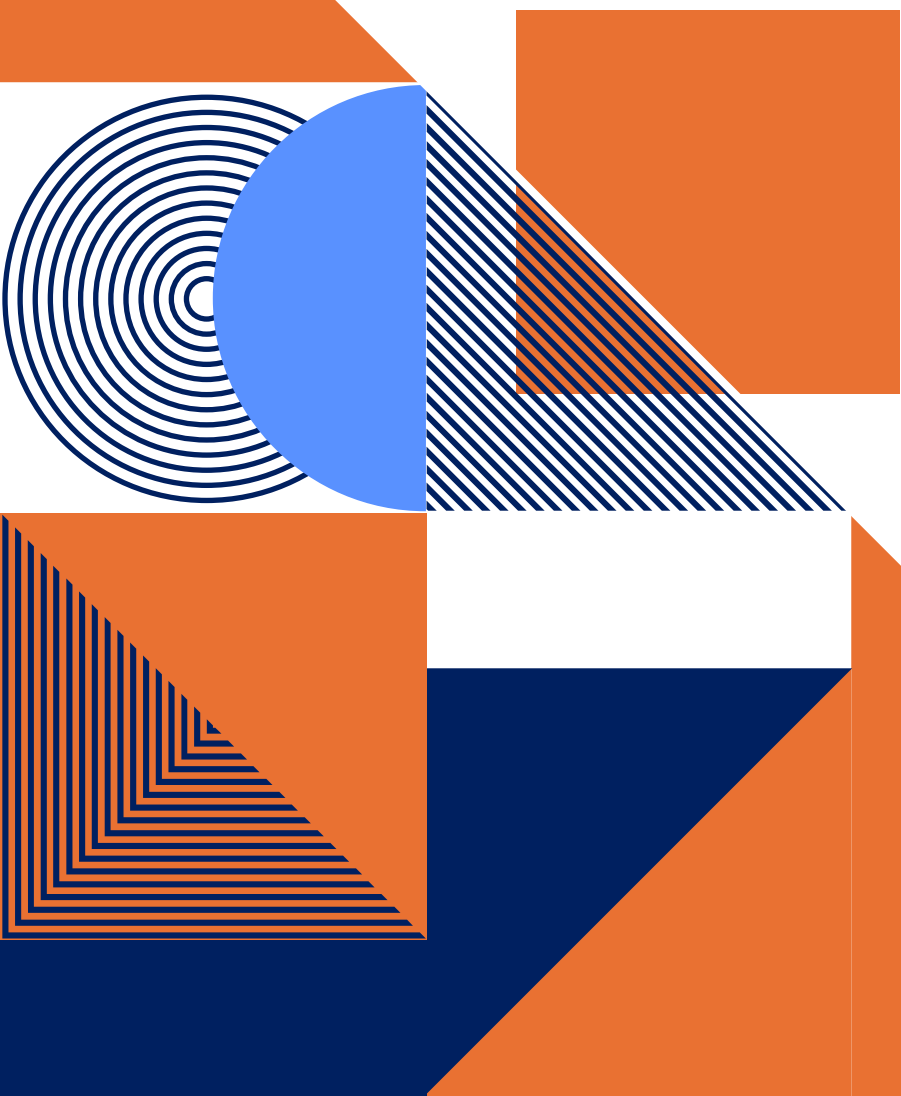
**Description:** Before scanning the ballots, the Absentee Specialist verifies that the scanner count displays “0”, confirming that no other ballots have been previously scanned into the machine. Ballots are then loaded into the scanner in batches of no more than 50. The total number of ballots scanned by the machine should equal the number of ballots in the batch.

Once the scan is complete, the specialist must select “Accept Batch” on the computer screen to submit the batch for processing. The total number of scanned ballots is reconciled to the Election Scanner Tally Sheet. In addition, a Scanned Ballot Manifest is completed with the scanner machine number, total ballots scanned, date, time, and signature of the specialist. The manifest is maintained at the scanner for the record.

**Observation:** During our visit, we observed the scanning of ballots through the scanner feeder in the scanning room. Upon completion of the scan, the batch was accepted in the system, and the required information was recorded on the Scanned Ballot Manifest. The total scanned ballots were reconciled without exception.

**Recommendation:** None

## 6. BALLOT UPLOAD & RETENTION



# BALLOT UPLOAD

**Description:** The scanned and counted ballot information is uploaded to the GARViS system by the Information System personnel in the server room.

**Observation:** We observed the data upload, noting the information from the ballot scan was transmitted to the server. We reviewed the results from the Tally and Reporting (tabulate/calculate votes). However, the results could not be validated until after 7 p.m. on Election Day.

**Recommendation:** None



# BALLOT RETENTION

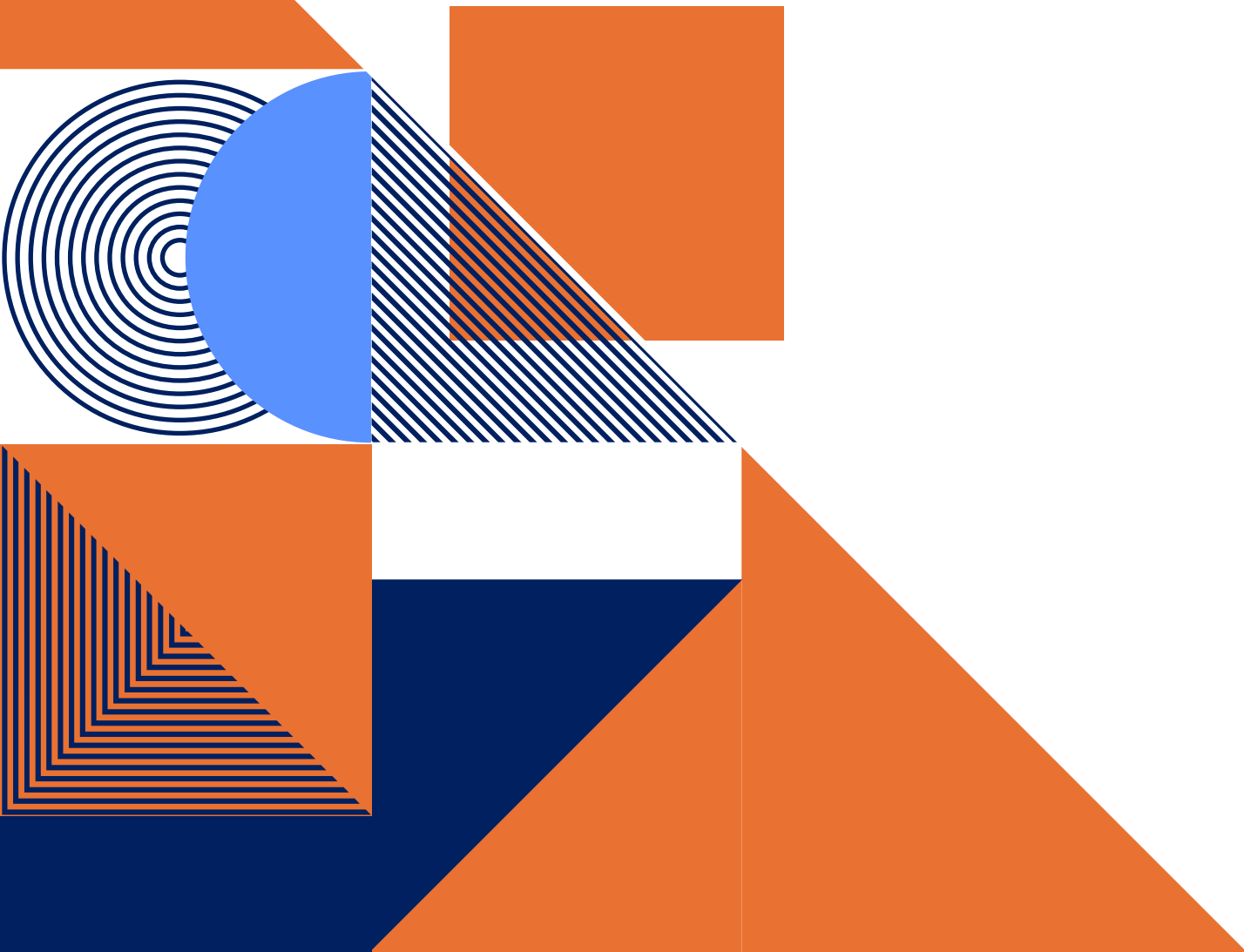
**Description:** Scanned ballots are placed inside a ballot retention box, labeled, and stored according to the retention policy for two years.

**Observation:** During our visit, we observed the storage of the scanned ballots. We also observed that the ballot box number where the ballots were stored was documented on the Scanned Ballot Manifest.

**Recommendation:** None



# 7. CONSENT ORDER





# RISK LIMITING AUDIT

**Description:** As part of the consent order associated with SEB Case 2021-181, the Fulton County Board of Registration and Elections agreed to implement written policies and procedures for risk-limiting audits for all elections for which risk-limiting audits (RLA) are required under SEB Rule 183-1-15-04. Additionally, they agreed to adequately train all election staff involved in conducting an RLA in advance of each election.

**Observation:** During our visit, there was no Risk Limiting Audit (RLA) being performed. However, we obtained a RLA Notice from the Fulton County R&E website indicating that an RLA was selected by the Secretary of State pursuant to O.C.G.A. 21-2-498(b)(c) for the May 19, 2026, General Primary Election. The notice stated that the RLA would begin on May 29, 2026, and continue until completion, but no later than June 1, 2026.

We obtained the RLA Standard Operating Procedures, the General Election Risk Limiting Audit Oath, the Oath of Consolidation Assistants, and the RLA training video.

**Recommendation:** None





## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

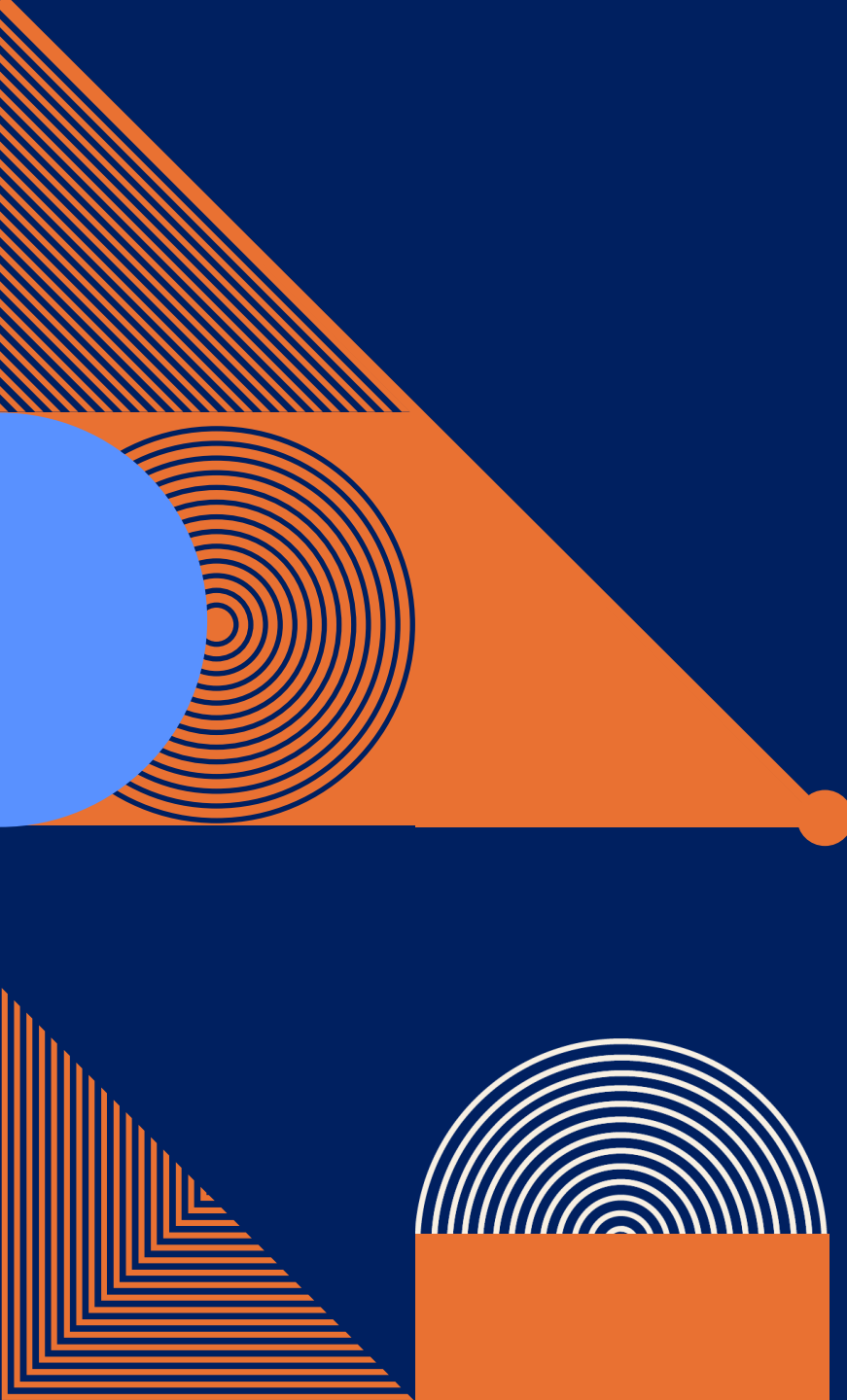


As a result of our review of the Registration & Elections Absentee Voting Process, we have the following recommendations:

1. We recommend updating the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to reflect the revised processes for mailing ballots through the third-party vendor. Additionally, we recommend implementing oversight controls to monitor vendor performance and ensure compliance with applicable election laws, regulations, and contract requirements.

2. We recommend obtaining and documenting the specific verification and reconciliation procedures performed by the third-party vendor related to ballot processing, counting, and mailing activities. We also recommend updating SOPs to reflect these vendor processes and establishing oversight controls, such as periodic monitoring, to ensure completeness and accuracy.

3. We recommend updating the SOPs to reflect processes for the safekeeping and transportation of ballots by the third-party vendor. The procedures should clearly define the vendor's responsibilities, and the department's oversight and monitoring controls to ensure the security and integrity of the ballots.



# THANK YOU

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County Auditor