
Re: URGENT – Newport Beach November 3 Special Municipal Election – Signature Verification Access

From Jessica Blair <jessica@thestellaragroup.com>

Date Wed 9/23/2026 10:18 AM

To Rodriguez, Rodney <rrodriguez2@sos.ca.gov>

Cc Vote Call Help (SOS) <votecalhelp@sos.ca.gov>; Shumway, Lena <lshumway@newportbeachca.gov>; Page, Bob <bob.page@ocvote.gov>

Attention: This email originated from outside the County of Orange. Use caution when opening attachments or links.

Hi Rodney,

I wanted to follow up on your email because I was a little confused when I received it given the phone conversations we had Monday and Tuesday.

To reiterate what I explained during those conversations, the GEM I referenced in my Saturday conversation with Solange is a separate company providing a separate service from “GEMS,” the voting/tabulation system that was decertified by the Secretary of State in 2018.

I also explained that the City had already contracted with Hart InterCivic for the voting/tabulation system. Hart is a certified voting system provider. My understanding is that you also spoke with Rigo Garcia from the City of Whittier, who confirmed that distinction.

Because we had discussed and clarified this before your Wednesday email, I initially understood the email as simply closing the loop on the earlier inquiry and did not respond further.

Since then, however, the email and the suggestion that the City was still searching for a certified voting system have become part of the public discussion surrounding the election. I therefore wanted to make sure the written record accurately reflects what we discussed: GEM's role relates to voter data management; it is not the City's voting/tabulation system. The City's voting/tabulation system is Hart.

Given the unusual nature of this election and the potential for voter confusion, I think it is important that the distinction between these two separate systems and functions is clear.

Thank you for your time and for the work you and your team do supporting elections throughout the state.

Jessica Blair, MMC
Newport Beach Elections Consultant
p: 818-903-0627

From: Rodriguez, Rodney <rrodriguez2@sos.ca.gov>

Sent: Wednesday, September 16, 2026 12:58 PM

To: jessica@thestellaragroup.com <jessica@thestellaragroup.com>

Cc: VoteCalHelp@sos.ca.gov <votecalhelp@sos.ca.gov>

Subject: Fw: URGENT – Newport Beach November 3 Special Municipal Election – Signature Verification Access

Hi Jessica,

Thank you for taking my calls the past few days. As discussed yesterday morning, I wanted to provide you with the following information.

State law is clear. A voting system, in whole or in part, shall not be used unless it has been certified or conditionally approved by the Secretary of State prior to any election at which it is to be used (Elec. Code §§ 19202(a) and 19006(a)).

Additionally, pursuant to Elections Code section 19207.5, "[a]n elections official or the governing body of any jurisdiction that administers elections shall use a voting machine . . . that has been certified pursuant to this division, to do all of the following: (1) Provide sufficient numbers of voting machines or voting systems for accessibility pursuant to Section 19242 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (52 U.S.C. Sec. 20901 et seq.), and (2) Tabulate votes."

Moreover, Elections Code section 19003 states "Notwithstanding any other provision of the law to the contrary, including any city or county ordinance, unless that other provision of the law is deemed consistent with this division, this division shall govern voting systems." Section 19200 et seq. of the Elections Code governs the certification those voting systems. As such, if Newport Beach seeks to use a voting system, it must use an approved voting system vendor. GEMS, the voting system Newport Beach stated they will use for the upcoming November 3, 2026, election, is not an approved voting system by the State of California. The following voting system vendors are approved for use in California; Hart InterCivic, Liberty Vote USA, and Elections Systems & Software (ES&S). Information on each vendor, including the specific system versions approved for use in California, can be found on our website under the respective vendor links at:

<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ovsta/voting-technology-vendors>.

Please let me know if I can be of assistance in the future.

Regards,

Rodney Rodriguez
IT Supervisor II - OVSTA
California Secretary of State
T: (916) 584-3076
E: rrodriguez2@sos.ca.gov

From: Jessica Blair <jessica@thestellaragroup.com>

Sent: Saturday, September 12, 2026 9:14 AM

To: VoteCalHelp@sos.ca.gov <vote calhelp@sos.ca.gov>

Subject: URGENT – Newport Beach November 3 Special Municipal Election – Signature Verification Access

Caution: External Email Warning: This is an email from an external sender. Do not click any links or attachments unless you have confirmed the sender. Report phishing by using the phishing alert button.

I am assisting the City Clerk of the City of Newport Beach with administration of three court-ordered municipal initiative measures to be submitted to Newport Beach voters on November 3, 2026.

The City is preparing to administer these measures separately from the election being conducted by the Orange County Registrar of Voters. The City has received the applicable voter registration file from Orange County; however, that file does not include voter signature images.

Because the City will be responsible for vote-by-mail ballot processing and signature verification under Elections Code section 3019 and the applicable Secretary of State regulations, we need to establish the legally authorized and operationally scalable mechanism for accessing the voter registration signatures necessary to perform those comparisons.

Orange County has advised that it will not provide the City with a file containing voter signature images. We understand that voter signatures are subject to specific confidentiality and access restrictions, and we are not asking for access outside of

those requirements.

Could you please advise:

1. What mechanism is available to a city elections official independently conducting a municipal election to access the voter registration signatures necessary to perform VBM signature verification under Elections Code section 3019?
2. May a county elections official securely provide signature images or other electronic access to those signatures to the city elections official for this election-administration purpose?
3. If direct transmission of signature images is not permitted, what mechanism should the City use to perform signature verification electronically and at scale?
4. Is there a VoteCal or other state-authorized process available for this circumstance?

Timing is extremely critical. This is a court-ordered November 3, 2026 election that is being implemented on an extraordinarily compressed schedule. If possible, we would greatly appreciate speaking with the appropriate Elections Division or VoteCal staff member as soon as possible Monday morning.

I am available at any time and would be happy to provide additional information regarding the election or the City's planned signature-verification process.

Thank you,

Jessica Blair, MMC

The Stellara Group
Election Administration Consultant
City of Newport Beach

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