



I-187 COVID-19 Advisory

Updated as of 5/8/2020 (2:32 PM) -- Check back here for updates

Please resume signature gathering on I-187. However, to do it by mail. You no longer need to have signatures notarized as long as you submit the “Unsworn Declaration of Signature Gatherer” Form with your petition. [Our press release on this is here.](#)

Please do not resume face-to-face collection of signatures on I-187 petitions and face-to-face notarization of the signatures you have obtained. As many of you know, COVID-19 can infect and injure people in any age group. It can be spread by people without observable symptoms in early and later stages of the disease. It affects people differently and some will die upon contacting it especially if we cannot contain the spread of the virus and if the increase in number of patients overwhelms local healthcare systems. Because we or the people we encounter may be asymptomatic, we cannot tell whether we or someone else is carrying COVID-19. While testing our own temperature and self-isolating before contacting others face-to-face or via mail, etc. we can minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19. Even taking prudent measures like wearing facemasks is not a guarantee that face-to-face contact is safe. So far as we know, no one who has collected signatures for I-187 has the virus.

Using the newly approved procedure, we are proceeding to urge voters to [print and mail material found here](#) in order to place I-187 on the November ballot. The Secretary of State has accepted 41.9% (10,922) of the signatures we need. We believe we have 2% to 3% more than that yet to be turned in. Please:

- 1) **Go to our [website & check the “How to Sign” & “How to Gather...” tabs;](#)**
 - 2) **Via phone, social media buttons at our website, and mail, encourage your friends to learn more about signing I-187. This is critical we must average 399 mailed-in signatures a day for 45 days to qualify I-187;**
 - 3) Encourage folks to check on their voting status by clicking the “voter registration...” link in the footer at www.mtcares.org and to reregister or register to be ready to mail-in a signed I-187 petition;
 - 4) Volunteer to safely help; and
 - 5) [Donate to support I-187](#) and climate crisis education.
1. **On March 25 & 28 we sought emergency rulemaking from the Governor and Secretary of State (SOS) & on April 8 a declaratory ruling from the Secretary of State. You may view those requests at https://www.mtcares.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/covid-19-i-187-update-3_25.pdf or <https://www.mtcares.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/declaratory-opinion-on-verification-form.pdf>**
 2. Electronic notarization of signatures is possible under Montana law. However, only out-of-state notaries offer this service at a cost of \$25 a notarization. Thus, at present that is not a viable way to proceed when we often must get a petition sheet with 1 or 2 signatures on it notarized to submit the sheet to one of 56 counties. We requested replacing the notarization requirement with an unsworn verification -- something law allows. [SOS agreed here.](#)
 3. **Printing the petition & verification, signing, & mailing them to your county avoids in-person contact. Mailing with verification will get signatures accepted. So, [please start mailing.](#)**
 4. We asked the Governor to move the date by which petitions must be submitted to have signatures counted, adding 2 weeks at the end of the gathering period without running afoul of constitutional and statutory time constraints. A request to add 6 weeks to the gathering period [was denied by a court.](#)
 5. While electronic signatures are allowed in other Montana transactions, gathering signatures online on ballot petitions is not now allowed by Montana law or by a [April 29, 2020 court ruling](#). Even if electronic signatures were to be permitted by an emergency rule, it may still require between \$0.40 and \$3.50 per signature to ensure the validity of the electronic signature. This cost would be prohibitive, so this option is not being evaluated further.
 6. Since the Montana Constitution requires 5% of the voters in the last gubernatorial election to sign before an initiative is eligible to be on the ballot, our Governor cannot waive that requirement even in an emergency. The