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Thoughts on the July 1, 2026 deadline on the use of ballots with QR codes

In the 2024 session of the Georgia General Assembly, [Senate Bill 189](#) was passed which pertains to Georgia election laws regarding election procedures, voting rights, and election board regulations. The legislation was signed into law.

Only Section 7 of Senate Bill 189 has an effective date beyond 2025, and its effective date is July 1, 2026. Section 7 specifies that the text portion of the paper ballot constitutes the official ballot for vote tabulation, recounts, and audits. It explicitly excludes QR codes, bar codes, or similar machine coding from being used for these purposes.

This ensures that the human-readable text on the ballot governs the election results, enhancing transparency and reducing reliance on machine-readable codes.

Only two other states use QR codes for vote tabulation state-wide. It does not seem unreasonable for a voter to question if his or her vote is cast correctly if a computer-generated code, readable only by a computer, is what is used for counting the vote. The measure was passed with confidence that a study committee would find the answers necessary to address the issue and for enabling legislation to be approved by both chambers before the end of the 2025-2026 General Assembly.

Although it is a very complex issue, Rep. Victor Anderson, chairman of the House Governmental Affairs committee and members of that committee did find the correct language in their *substitute* to [Senate Bill 214](#) which would have provided a method and procedure for voting without a QR code before the July 1, 2026 effective date set in Senate Bill 189.

Unfortunately, the Senate did not agree with the House substitute before the 2026 General Assembly was adjourned Sine Die and, therefore, was lost. A Senate

bill to extend July 1, 2026, deadline set by section 7 Of SB189 was not approved by that chamber and therefore did not come to the House.

It is important to keep in mind that neither Senate Bill 189 nor Senate Bill 214 calls for the hand-counting of ballots. And in fact, neither bill mandates that ballots must be hand marked, only that the vote is recorded in text.

With the above in mind, it is a fact that all mail-in absentee¹ ballots are hand-marked, then upon receipt and verified as legal ballots are scanned by an optical scanner which recognizes the marks in the ovals on the ballot and then the votes are recorded for tabulation.

Therefore, in my opinion, the model as prescribed in the *House substitute* to Senate Bill 214 already exists in the mail-in absentee voting mechanism. The optical character recognition (OCR) scanners recognize the mark, whether hand-printed or printed by a machine, inside the oval, and that vote is then sent for tabulation.

DLP April 28, 2026

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¹ Advanced in-person voting is considered to be “in-person absentee voting” as opposed to mail-in absentee voting