



Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.
California Secretary of State

NOTARY NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2025

Natural Disasters & the Notary Public

The most recent wildfires in Southern California have affected many lives and businesses, and the California Secretary of State is committed to reducing their impact when providing the services offered by our office. We continue to assist the public with Apostilles that were in transit when evacuation orders were issued, and support notaries in receiving a duplicate seal authorization or updating address information.

For those who may need replacement documents authenticated, our Los Angeles and Sacramento offices provide same-day Apostille services and are open to the public Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, excluding state holidays.

For additional information or assistance, email NotaryMail@sos.ca.gov or call 916-653-3595.

California is a beacon of innovation and of resilience. When disaster strikes, Californians stand together to rebuild and recover and apply lessons learned as we move forward. My staff and I are committed to minimizing the impacts of disasters when possible and, in that spirit, we continue to assist those in Southern California in need of business services such as Apostilles and notaries.

This edition of the Notary Newsletter highlights our current efforts to help those in need move forward and provides additional information about California Secretary of State business services. And you can learn more about our business program services at <https://www.sos.ca.gov/business-programs/>

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Establishing Identity

Notaries in the Los Angeles area have requested guidance on displaced individuals who lack identification due to unforeseen circumstances, e.g. recent wildfires and evacuations, and need a document notarized. As a notary public, it is important to remember the requirements for identification as well as refresh your understanding of when it is appropriate to use a credible witness.

- Currently, California notaries cannot accept mobile (digital) identification cards.
- Notaries should refer to Civil Code section 1185 for all qualifying forms of identification.

Credible Witnesses

When a disaster strikes and evacuations occur, it is possible for an individual to be left without an acceptable form of identification. This is a time when credible witnesses may need to be used. A **credible witness** is a person who can establish the identity of the signer by oath when the signer does not have identification available.

- In California, a person cannot act as a credible witness if they have a financial interest or benefit from the documents being notarized.
- The best practice is to use two credible witnesses, although a single credible witness can be used if the credible witness is personally known by the notary public. Signature and identifying documents are required to be documented for all credible witnesses used for the notarization.
- A notary public must establish the identity of each credible witness in their notary journal; this includes the type of identification used, serial number, issuing agency, and expiration date.

Below is an example of what a notary journal record may look like for a notarial act establishing identity through means of two credible witnesses:

Line Item	Date and Time	Type of Notarization	Character or Type of Instrument	Name of Signer	Identity Established by
1	1/1/25 1:32 PM	Acknowledgment	Grant Deed	John Doe	Credible Witness
2	1/1/25 1:33 PM	Oath	Credible Witness	John Smith	Satisfactory Evidence
3	1/1/25 1:34 PM	Oath	Credible Witness	Jane Smith	Satisfactory Evidence

Fee	Additional Information	Identification Details	Signature	Thumbprint
\$15	Document signed and date 12/28/2024	Credible Witness John Smith and Jane Smith	X <i>John Doe</i>	
\$0	Acted as credible witness for John Doe	California Dept of Motor Vehicles California Driver's License N1234567 exp. 1-12-2026	X <i>John Smith</i>	
\$0	Acted as credible witness for John Doe	California Dept of Motor Vehicles California Driver's License C7654321 exp. 12-12-2027	X <i>Jane Smith</i>	

Lost or Stolen Journal or Seal

Notaries may have lost their seal(s) and journal(s) due to the wildfires and might be unsure how to get a new one or how to notify the California Secretary of State's office of the loss or what to do if someone requests a line item from a lost or stolen journal.

What to do if your notary journal and/or seal is lost, stolen, or damaged

- Complete the [Duplicate Seal Authorization Request/ Report Lost or Stolen Seal and/or Journal Form](#) found on the SOS website.

Ensure your signature on the form matches the official signature on your Notary Public Oath filed at the County Clerk's office. If your journal or seal has been stolen, include a copy of a police report documenting the reported stolen item(s).

A Duplicate Seal Authorization Request Form can be used to request approval to order a new seal. Your new seal can be rectangular or circular to differentiate from previous seals. One seal authorization can be used to order up to two seals.

Mail the form to the California Secretary of State by certified mail or any other means of physical delivery that provides a receipt.

When you request a duplicate seal authorization, your commission number stays the same. A notary public will not receive a new commission number unless you resign your commission and reapply.

What to do if someone requests a line item from a journal that was lost in the wildfires

- Government Code section [8206.5](#) requires a notary public to respond to a line-item request within 15 business days after receipt of the request to acknowledge the records are unavailable.
- A suitable response for records that are unavailable due to a lost journal may look like:

I received your line-item entry request for [Insert Document Name] dated for [insert date] signed by [insert signer(s) name]. I am unable to provide a line-item entry due to loss of my notary journal for the requested period. I informed the California Secretary of State of the loss of my journal due to [insert reason, e.g. 2025 Los Angeles Wildfire] on [insert lost/stolen report date].



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Update Address Information

A notary public that has a new business, home or mailing address must notify the California Secretary of State.

What to do if you need to update your address(s)

- Complete the [Notary Public Address Change Form](#) found on our SOS Website.

Ensure you complete all information even if some addresses have not changed.

Ensure your signature on the form matches the official signature on your oath filed at the County Clerk's office.

Mail to the Secretary of State by certified mail or any other means of physical delivery that provides a receipt.

Government Code section 8213.5 requires a notary public to notify the Secretary of State within 30 days as to any change in the location or address of the principal place of business or residence. If there are any concerns fulfilling this requirement, please contact the Secretary of State as soon as possible.

NEW AT SOS APOSTILLE POP-UP SHOPS



The California Secretary of State and our staff are committed to ensuring that our services are accessible, efficient, and customer friendly; the innovative Apostille Pop-Up Shops exemplify our office's dedication to provide our services to all Californians. An Apostille is a certificate that authenticates a public official's signature on a document to be used in another country. Recognizing that the process can be challenging, particularly for those impacted by natural disasters and for those who live far from our Sacramento and Los Angeles offices, the California Secretary of State offers Apostille Pop-Up Shops to bring Apostille services to local communities. Through partnerships with local county officials, we are making it easier for Californians to obtain an Apostille. The Apostille Pop-Up Shops offer same-day Apostille services. A current schedule of Apostille Pop-Up Shop events is available on our [Request an Apostille](#) web page.

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