

**COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
CALIFORNIA**

For the Agenda of:
January 29, 2019
Timed Item: 10:00 AM

To: Board of Supervisors

Through: Navdeep S. Gill, County Executive

From: Courtney Bailey-Kanelos, Registrar of Voters,
Voter Registration and Elections

Subject: Update On The Implementation Of The Voter's Choice Act

District(s): All

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive and file this report.

BACKGROUND

In June 2017, the Board of Supervisors approved the adoption of the Voter's Choice Act in Sacramento County. Sacramento County was the largest County in California to adopt this new voting model for the 2018 elections and was joined by Nevada, Madera, Napa, and San Mateo Counties. The VCA requires all registered voters to receive a ballot in the mail and established Vote Centers and Ballot Drop Box locations to provide additional voting options and services for any voter in the County. The goal of adopting this new model was to increase voter participation and turnout while improving the use of County resources to provide services based on the voters needs and preference.

Both the June 5, 2018 and November 6, 2018 Elections conducted under the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) were well received by the voters in Sacramento County. The new model expands voting opportunities and accessibility to the electorate by providing different options for voters to cast and return their ballot. Voters could choose to use their ballot that was mailed to them or vote in-person at any of the Vote Centers located throughout the County on or before Election Day.

The June and November 2018 elections saw an increase in voter turnout statewide, especially in the counties that adopted the Voter's Choice Act. For the November 6, 2018 Election, Sacramento County saw the highest turnout for a midterm General Election in County history.

June 5, 2018 Primary Election Statistics

- Number of Registered Voters: 741,260
- Number of Voters: 310,881
- Number of Vote by Mail Voters: 292,777
- Number of Vote Center Voters: 18,104
- Number Precincts: 573
- Percentage of Turnout: 41.94%
- Percentage of Vote by Mail Ballots Cast: 94.18%
- Percentage of Vote Center Ballots Cast: 5.82%
- Number of Conditional Voter Registrations: 2,895

November 6, 2018 General Election Statistics

- Number of Registered Voters: 765,965
- Number of Voters: 522,652
- Number of Vote by Mail Voters: 492,373
- Number of Vote Center Voters: 30,279
- Number of Precincts: 593
- Percentage of Turnout: 68.23%
- Percentage of Vote by Mail Ballots Cast: 94.21%
- Percentage of Vote Center Ballots Cast: 5.79%
- Number of Conditional Voter Registrations: 11,047

Voting Options and Voter Satisfaction

Voters in Sacramento County overwhelmingly chose to use their ballot that was mailed to them by VRE.

A total of 53 Ballot Drop Box Locations were established, including boxes at all 28 Sacramento Public Library locations.

- For the June election, of the 292,777 voters that chose to use their ballot that was mailed to them, 30% returned their ballot at a designated Drop Box, 30% returned their ballot at a Vote Center, and 40% returned it by mail.
- For the November election, of the 492,373 voters that chose to use their ballot that was mailed to them, 38% returned their ballot at a designated Drop Box, 28% returned their ballot at a Vote Center, and 34% returned it by mail.

For those that chose to vote in-person, Sacramento County established 78 Vote Center locations in both the June and November elections that could accommodate any voter in the County. Starting 10 days before Election Day, 18 locations were established with an additional 60 locations open the Saturday before Election Day. These early voting days allowed voters to cast their ballots at a time and location convenient to them.

With the assistance of the Department of Technology (DTECH), VRE was able to provide a secured, real-time connection to the voter file at all of the Vote Centers, which allowed for any voter to request a ballot and verify a ballot had not already been returned. Under the old polling place model, VRE was unable to determine if a ballot had already been returned by a voter which resulted in 33,333 provisional ballots cast in the November 2016 Presidential Election. This real-time connection improved the accuracy and integrity of the voting process by decreasing the possibility of Poll Worker errors using a paper roster that historically had to be printed 20 days before Election Day. This also saved VRE time and money by not having to bring in a dozen temporary staff to help process provisional ballots. For November 2018, VRE processed only 587 provisional ballots that were rejected because they did not meet the legal requirements to register and vote in Sacramento County. Vote Centers ensured each voter was able to cast only one ballot because any other ballot would instantaneously be voided.

VRE created a Voter Experience Survey available to all Vote Center voters. While voters reported a high level of satisfaction with their voting experience in both elections, VRE was able to improve voter satisfaction in the November election by implementing changes due to June election voter feedback. In June, 69% of 361 voters were "Very Satisfied" with their voting experience. Feedback concerning parking, space, equipment usage and configurations within the Vote Center, and signage prompted VRE to make changes before the November election. Improvements for November including staffing more Vote Center Staff (Poll Workers) just on Election Day, providing curbside ballot drop-off at the Vote Centers, VRE set-up of the equipment ahead of time to ensure accessibility and maximize room utilization, management of electrical cords using mats and tape, and more signage, including large feather flags that read "Vote Here" in English, Spanish, and Chinese. These improvements seem to help as our November Voter Experience Survey reported that of 517 responses, 80% were "very satisfied" with their voting experience.

Community Engagement and Voter Education

The Voter's Choice Act requires a robust public awareness campaign of the changes and voting opportunities of this new model. For every election, two postcards are mailed to every voter informing them of the upcoming election and information about their voting options. With help from community partners, we improved our messaging from the June to November elections, encouraging voters to use their Vote by Mail ballot and vote early.

Since the VCA was approved by the Board in 2017, VRE has participated in the following education events:

- 70 Community Outreach Events & Festivals

- 231 Presentations County-wide, including City Council Meetings
- 23 Presentations at Senior Facilities County-wide
- 44 High School Mock Elections
- 68 Senior Facilities that received flyers, posters, and brochures
- 164 government offices, restaurants, and supermarkets that received flyers, posters, and brochures

Media and social media played an important role in informing voters of the changes and options of this new model. The County included several posts on the County Facebook and Twitter page, including ads on digital media like iHeart Radio which used digital geo tracking for advertising on the VCA. In addition, VRE did the following media:

- 15 Local Newspapers, including Herberger Publications and Messenger Publishing Group
- 2 Entercom Radio Stations
- 3 Spanish speaking Radio Stations
- 1 Magazine
- 6 Television Stations using our Public Service Announcements, including Crossings TV which reaches the Chinese, Punjabi, Hmong, Tagalog, and Vietnamese speaking communities

VRE also established a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee and a Language Accessibility Advisory Committee that worked on messaging and identifying and removing barriers for voters with specific needs. In addition, regular calls and meetings were held with the other VCA counties, community advocates, and cities to develop messaging and outreach plans to inform their respective constituents of the changes under the Voter's Choice Act.

Voting Equipment

The last voting system was purchased in 2004. In the 2016 election cycle, VRE experienced the effects of that aging voting system as patches and workarounds were becoming costly, ineffective, or unfeasible. The acquisition of a new voting system was integral in supporting the new voting options under the VCA. VRE established new contracts with election vendors Dominion Voting System, Democracy Live, and Tenex.

Dominion Voting System

- **Ballot Tabulation:** The new HiPro and G1130 scanners tabulated over a million cards in the November election. Accuracy in tabulating ballots and capturing the ballot images was essential in post-election audits. The ease of the new machines was appreciated by the staff. In addition, the security features and two factor authentication ensured that tabulated results stayed secured. This new system also accommodates ballot cards to be counted from any precinct, resulting

in faster processing of the returned Vote by Mail ballots that do not have to be sorted down to the precinct level.

- **Ballot Adjudication:** Historically, adjudication was the bottleneck of ballot processing. All returned Vote by Mail ballots are reviewed to ensure they will be read by the ballot tabulator. If the ballot has questionable marks, if the bubble on the ballot is not completely filled in, or if a voter chooses to vote for a write-in candidate, the ballot goes through adjudication, a process to review and identify ballot results that the system could not detect or interpret. Under the new ballot adjudication process, the scanned images of the ballot are reviewed by teams of two in order to determine voter intent and record qualified write-in candidates. This ensures that the scanned ballots all stayed together for accounting purposes. This system also allows review of just those ballots with ambiguous marks and write-ins instead of having to go through every ballot card. An "audit mark" is attached to every ballot that had any adjudication and robust reports ensured that paper ballots could be located if there were any questions. Ballot processing teams worked half the amount of hours as they did in 2016, even with more Vote by Mail ballots cast in November.
- **Accessible Ballot Marking Device:** The ImageCast X (ICX) Ballot Marking Device is a device that allows all voters to vote independently and privately. Under the Voter's Choice Act, all Vote Centers are required to have a minimum of three machines. Voters overwhelmingly had a positive response to the new ballot marking devices, saying it was easy to use like their smartphones, easy to read the ballot information in any of the federally required languages of their choice, and even that it was "fun". For both elections, approximately 36% of all ballots cast at a Vote Center were marked using the ICX device.
- **Mobile Ballot Printer:** VRE selected the OKI 712 Ballot Printer certified by Dominion. The OKI 712 had fans to avoid overheating, an automatic duplexer, and a built-in paper feed tray to print ballots quickly. These ballot printers successfully printed a large number of ballots at Vote Centers in the November election.

Democracy Live was the selected vendor to provide an accessible vote by mail system as required under the VCA. This system allows voters with disabilities to visit a web application to mark their ballot at home using their own assistive technology, print out their selections, and return it using their Vote by Mail envelope or blank envelopes provided at every Vote Center and Ballot Drop Box. Paper Vote by Mails are not traditionally accessible as someone would have to physically mark the ballot for someone who is blind or sight impaired or has physical disabilities. This solution allowed voters with disabilities to vote independently and privately at their convenience. In June, only 4 voters took advantage of this solution. Community partners

helped VRE share information about this new voting option and VRE had 39 voters take advantage of this service in November. VRE is committed to work on messaging to inform the community of this option.

Tenex was selected to provide a comprehensive web application tracking system of calls and issues received by VRE on or before Election Day. All VRE staff was trained to use this system to report complaints, recommendations, suggestions, questions, and any issues from the Vote Centers. Not only has this helped VRE to review the comments for future improvements suggested directly from voters, but it has enabled an efficient system for deploying technical support teams to the Vote Centers and ensuring all issues are resolved timely. The reports available from this application also assist in providing training improvements for the Vote Center staff.

Future Improvements

VRE, along with DTECH and supporting vendors, are looking at what improvements can be made moving into the 2020 election cycle.

- Vote Centers: procure locations with more space in the voting area and more parking to ensure maximum voter privacy; provide more support on Election Day to assist with Conditional Voter Registration; improve Vote Center staff training and flow of processing voters at the Vote Centers; more exterior directional signage; line/crowd management
- Ballot Drop Box: procure locations with longer hours open to the public; acquire more external 24-hour drop boxes
- Messaging: encourage voters to vote early; improve communication on services available at Vote Centers and voting options; pre-paid postage for returned Vote by Mail ballots for all elections effective January 1, 2019
- Vote by Mail processing: additional equipment and software to expedite verifying, extracting, and processing of Vote by Mail ballots
- Election Results: improve Election night reporting and manage expectations on ballot processing timeframes and results updates
- Website: redesign to ensure easy access to important voter information
- Cybersecurity: with \$55,000 allocated by the State, VRE will be conducting a comprehensive cybersecurity review

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The largest investment implementing the Voter's Choice Act was in the acquisition of a new voting system. VRE spent \$2,658,074 on Dominion Voting Systems, which included:

- \$740,997 on Ballot Tabulators

- \$1,074,125 on Accessible Ballot Marking Devices (ICX Touchscreen), including laptops and voting booths
- \$650,000 on Ballot Printers
- \$105,000 for Ballot Adjudication
- \$87,952 for software, licensing, and training costs

In addition, \$81,800 was spent on Democracy Live's Accessible Vote by Mail software, and \$18,000 on Tenex's Election Day Help Desk. The cost of real-time access to the voter, using laptops and providing connectivity was \$383,000. Most of this cost was offset by prior costs of printing and issuing rosters, Election night support, and canvass procedures like processing the returned rosters, ballot adjudication, and the reduction of provisional ballots.

In 2018, the Governor approved matching reimbursements from the state for all voting equipment purchased by the counties. Sacramento County is eligible for being reimbursed for half of what was spent purchasing this new equipment, not to exceed \$4.7 million.