

October 10, 2014

Dear Council President Herb Wesson and LA City Council members,

Re: Increasing voter turnout by moving the Election Day to June/November of even years

We write to commend Los Angeles City Council for taking an honest look at the ongoing problem of low voter turnout in Los Angeles City elections. In 2013, when we had an open race for the mayor's seat, and open races for city council seats, we were all shocked when the elections drew less than 1 in four voters to cast a ballot.

We all have seared in our collective conscience now the ongoing civil demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri. In a city that is over 65% African American residents, the fact that the Mayor and 5 of 6 of the City Council members were white only served to reinforce the problem of racial and political disconnect. For Angelenos, the lessons go deeper: Ferguson's city elections were held in April 2013, off cycle like Los Angeles. The Washington Post found that where the November 2012 Presidential elections drew 55% of all voters to participate, the April 2013 municipal elections drew only 17% of whites, and an even lower 6% of African Americans to vote.¹ Democracy cannot thrive where participation is exclusive.

Having served now on the Los Angeles City Clerk's Voting Alternatives Committee, Los Angeles City's Municipal City Elections Reform Commission, and the Los Angeles 2020 Commission, we can state that the research shows there is one proposal has been demonstrated to have a clear and significant impact on voter participation: **MOVING LOS ANGELES CITY ELECTION DAY TO THE SAME CYCLE AS THE PRESIDENTIAL AND GOVERNOR'S ELECTIONS, JUNE AND NOVEMBER OF THE EVEN YEARS, WILL SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT.**

The 2013 Los Angeles City Clerk's Report on Alternative Voting Methods observed:

If the City were to align its elections with elections held in November of even-numbered years, voter turnout for general municipal elections will likely increase. Research indicates that local elections aligned with elections held in November of even-numbered years typically have a voter turnout 36% higher than off-cycle elections.² Turnout for these elections are typically higher due to greater public interest in high profile contests, such as the President or Governor. Locally, the average voter turnout in cities that held elections in November 2012 was around 69% which is similar to the turnout in those elections in 2008.

¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/15/how-ferguson-exposes-the-racial-bias-in-local-elections/>.

² Hajnal Zoltan, et. al., "Municipal Elections in California: Turnout, Timing, and Competition." Public Policy Institute of California. 2002. Pp. vii-viii.

The City Clerk's report cites a Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) 2002 study of 350 California cities. This study actually looked at other possible factors that might impact turnout, from how hot a local race might be to whether a city had term limits or other institutional differences. PPIC researchers concluded that:

"As it turns out, our statistical analysis indicates that election timing is, in fact, the most important factor influencing city turnout." Page 36-37.

"Controlling for a host of other factors, presidential elections are associated with turnouts of registered voters in city elections that are 36 percent higher than off-cycle elections (which are "local-only" elections typically held in the spring); gubernatorial elections and presidential primaries are associated with municipal turnouts of 21 to 26 percent more registered voters." Page viii (emphasis added).

A recent 2013 University of California Merced study that examined data from 4,000 cities found that:

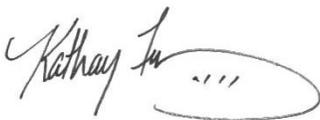
"Not mailing polling place locations is associated with a 5 percentage point decrease in turnout and non-concurrent elections are associated with a 14 point decrease." (emphasis added).

Concerns have been raised that a consolidated election will have a crowded ballot and that too many voters will "drop off" before they get to the city election choices. The evidence cited shows that the participation rates on city races in even-year consolidated elections is still higher than in elections on non-consolidated dates, even with anticipated drop off of voters as they move down the ballot from the federal or state election choices to local choices. If a Presidential race draws 70% of voters to cast a ballot rate, even if half of those voters choose not to vote for city elections, we would still have 10% more voters casting a vote in city elections than we did in 2013.

Additionally, concerns have been raised about how to manage the transition of terms for sitting election City council members. We think that the most politically prudent approach would be to present this question to voters as a measure separate from the question of whether to consolidate. The question of whether to incur additional election costs vs. allow some officeholders to extend their terms is one that should be debated separately from the consolidation question. If we learned anything from the state term limits reform efforts, we learned that good reforms, such as Prop. 28, can be passed if we keep the policy straightforward.

Given the potential to so dramatically increase voter participation in city elections, we strongly support the City Council moving forward with the proposal to change the city's election date to follow the Presidential and Governor's election cycle.

Sincerely,



Kathay Feng
California Common Cause