



May 20, 2020

TO: Mr. Dean Logan
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC)
County of Los Angeles
12400 Imperial Highway
Norwalk, CA 90605

CC: Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Planning for November Elections in Light of COVID-19 Pandemic and March election issues in Los Angeles County

Dear Registrar Logan,

We would like to thank your office for your leadership in improving the accessibility of Los Angeles County elections. The Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) program has brought some much-needed changes to when, where, and how Los Angeles County voters cast a ballot. Los Angeles County's most recent action in requesting that all registered voters in Los Angeles County are mailed a ballot beginning this fall is a critical step that provides some clarity during an uncertain time. We are writing to share our thoughts on some next steps for your office that we believe will help prepare Los Angeles County voters for the November 2020 general election. Below, we outline a set of recommendations that relate to the vote-by-mail program, in-person voting options, and public engagement and education that can be implemented beginning today to ensure a successful election this fall.

Over the years, our organizations have focused on expanding access to the ballot box and improving the voter experience in Los Angeles County. We have worked to support your office's election program in various capacities: as members of the VSAP Advisory Committee, LAAC (Language Accessibility Advisory Committee), and VAAC (Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee); as partner organizations in the Vote Center Placement Project; and as community members who engaged the public on the changes that were being made to Los Angeles County elections with VSAP. The key elements of VSAP make our elections system in Los Angeles County a much better fit for our electorate. The vote center model expands the days and locations where voters can cast their proper ballot, giving them more flexibility and choice when it comes to voting. The features of the ballot marking device (BMD) allow voters with accessibility needs and language needs to mark and cast their ballot on a seamless, integrated platform that mimics familiar technology we interact with on a daily basis. And the expansion of Same Day Voter Registration is a critical piece that ensures new county residents, people who have moved, students, and people experiencing homelessness are not arbitrarily shut out from our democratic process. These elements of VSAP are a major improvement from the system we have had for years.

The implementation of the VSAP program in March 2020 was not without its issues. Synchronization issues with ePollbooks led to long lines in some locations. Some BMDs experienced paper jams. Vote centers in some locations were not well-fit to accommodate the number of voters on Election Day. While we strongly believe that Los Angeles County is headed in the right direction by expanding voting options

and offering Los Angeles County voters maximum flexibility when it comes to voting, we believe that some aspects of election administration need to be refined between now and the November 2020 elections.

This work has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic poses an unprecedented challenge to all aspects of life, including our democracy. Conducting an election in a safe and healthy manner, without risking the disenfranchisement of our most vulnerable communities, will be exceptionally difficult. We commend the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for taking the critical first step of guaranteeing that all registered voters will be sent a ballot by mail rather than waiting for state action on the issue. Thanks to this action, millions of voters can be assured that their right to vote will be maintained regardless of the status of the pandemic.

[Your office's report on vote-by-mail implementation](#) outlines some key practices that serve as a model for other counties implementing Governor Newsom's recent order requiring all counties to send their voters a ballot by mail this fall. We are writing to share a set of recommendations to build on this plan and outline practices that fall outside the VBM implementation plan, which we believe will help accomplish our shared goals for the November 2020 election. These goals include:

1. *Ensuring that every registered voter receives a ballot by mail in their preferred language.*
2. *Offering a sufficient number of in-person voting locations offering voters Same Day Voter Registration, language support, accessible voting opportunities, and ballot dropoff.*
3. *Maintaining an 11-day voting period.*
4. *Addressing key issues from the March election including ePollbook synchronization, BMD functionality, and vote center staffing.*
5. *Ensuring that Los Angeles County voters are aware of the temporary and permanent changes in election administration that are taking place this fall, including how to return their ballot or receive a replacement ballot.*

We offer recommendations in three categories:

- (1) [Vote-by-mail](#)
- (2) [In-person voting](#)
- (3) [Public engagement and education](#)

Vote-by-Mail

The guarantee of every voter receiving a ballot by mail is a useful safety net that will help Los Angeles County voters participate in our democracy. At the same time, vote-by-mail is not a panacea to the election challenges we face in light of coronavirus. While California has instituted many policies that make vote-by-mail an inclusive and accessible voting option, some adjustments are still necessary and significant public education is needed to ensure that voters cast their ballot successfully. This includes: (a) ensuring voters receive their ballot and materials in their preferred language; (b) educating voters about how to request a replacement ballot and track the status of their ballot; (c) educating voters about how to sign their vote-by-mail ballot and cure their ballot in response to missing or mismatched signatures; and (d) educating voters about how to return their vote-by-mail ballot. Your report on vote-by-mail implementation referenced above tackles many of these issues.

We present several recommendations to enhance and/or build on the practices that your office outlined in that report:

1. **Conduct frequent voter communication focused on successful vote-by-mail usage**, including information on when and how to: (1) access your ballot, (2) request a replacement ballot, (3) request a ballot in your preferred language, (4) track your ballot status, (5) sign your ballot, (6) options for returning your ballot, and (7) cure your ballot in cases of missing or mismatch signatures.
 - a. We support the idea of a direct mailing, or multiple mailings if possible, to communicate the above information to voters. These mailings should include translations for the Section 14201 languages offered in Los Angeles County.
 - b. We also support the creation of a multicultural, multilingual voter education plan that aims to educate Los Angeles County's communities about the election changes taking place this fall.
 - c. Communications should include information on how voters can sign up for BallotTrax or other systems that allow them to track the status of their vote-by-mail ballot.

We provide additional recommendations on public education and engagement later in this letter.

2. **Institute robust and streamlined systems for voters to update their addresses, request replacement ballots, and request translated ballots.** This includes:
 - a. A clear, visible online platform that serves as a one-stop page for voters to receive election information and update their vote-by-mail preferences. This webpage should be featured on the lavote.net home page as soon as possible.
 - b. Increased call line capacity to receive requests for replacement ballots. We encourage the County to coordinate its hotline operations with election hotline and protection services hosted by several of the nonpartisan, non-profit organizations that are submitting this letter.
3. **Develop plans for contacting voters if their vote-by-mail ballot is determined to have a missing or mismatch signature during the canvass period.** The expansion of vote-by-mail means that many first-time vote-by-mail voters could risk having their ballot rejected due to a missing or mismatched signature. Current state law requires county elections officials to send these voters a notice and instructions on how to cure their signature. Los Angeles County should plan to exceed these requirements by initiating follow-up contacts when possible to remind voters to cure their signature before the specified deadline.
 - a. Efforts should be made prior to Election Day to collect voters' email addresses and phone numbers so they can be contacted by the RR/CC if they need to cure a signature problem.
 - b. The RR/CC should also develop plans to contact voters by email and phone during the canvass period to ensure that voters with signature issues cure their signature before the deadline. These plans can be developed in partnership with other county offices and nonpartisan, nonprofit partners.
4. **Work with college campuses to coordinate election plans for college students.** Student populations may or may not be on campuses this fall, which means that the County could risk sending vote-by-mail ballots to campus addresses that are uninhabited. The County should work with colleges, including the UC and CSU systems as well as community colleges, to communicate election changes to college students and to collect updated residence information so that students can receive their vote-by-mail ballots at the correct address this fall.
5. **Maximize the use of dropboxes in this November's election.** In adopting Section 4005 of the Voter's Choice Act (VCA), the number of required dropboxes has increased. We support the County's plans to maximize the use of 24-hour dropboxes. We also support the County's plan to establish dropboxes outside of vote centers to ensure that voters dropping off ballots have

convenient drop-off opportunities without having to enter a vote center. These dropboxes established outside vote centers should not count towards the total dropbox count required by the VCA. The expansion of dropboxes should be used to expand voting opportunities to voters and equally distribute drop-off opportunities across the county.

6. **Identify other areas of improvement in the vote-by-mail program for the most marginalized voters.** People experiencing homelessness, incarcerated individuals, and those who have been displaced by the pandemic are at extremely high risk of not receiving a ballot by mail and may not receive messages about in-person voting options. The County should make specific plans to issue vote-by-mail ballots to these groups and educate them about their in-person voting options.

In-Person Voting

We appreciate your Department's commitment to maximizing voting opportunities. In the March 2020 election, your Department offered over 200 additional voting locations more than what was required under the VCA. We support continuing to treat the VCA minimum vote center requirement, and any impending state action that would impact this requirement, as a floor that Los Angeles County will exceed to the best of its ability. In-person locations will offer voting opportunities to those who feel more comfortable casting a ballot in person and will provide critical in-person voting services, including offering replacement ballots, language support for limited-English proficient communities, accessible voting units for voters with disabilities, and Same Day Voter Registration. These services are also critical for communities with limited mail access, including people experiencing homelessness, incarcerated populations, students, and those who have been displaced by the pandemic. We acknowledge that the pandemic may limit the availability of locations that can serve as vote centers in November. Our goal is to work with your office in identifying locations that will grant Los Angeles County residents the voting opportunities they need to participate in our democracy.

Our organizations support the following as it relates to the November 2020 elections:

1. **Address issues that arose in the March 2020 election.** The technical and logistical issues that Los Angeles County experienced in this past election should be addressed before November. This includes:
 - a. Confirming ePollbook capacity to check-in voters in an expedient manner. ePollbook synchronization was the main issue that led to slow processing times, long lines in some locations, and an increase in provisional ballots. This issue must be addressed in coordination with other entities, including the Secretary of State's office, ahead of the November 2020 elections.
 - b. Improving BMD functionality before November. Paper jams and under-trained vote center staff left many BMDs inoperable in the March election. This issue must be addressed with the manufacturer as well as in the vote center training curriculum to ensure that BMDs are fully functioning in future elections. Also, modifications can be made to the BMDs to ensure that voters do not leave the BMDs without casting their ballots. These modifications can include a pulse feature, additional colors, and/or other features to capture voters' attention if they are walking away without completing the voting process.
 - c. Reviewing election worker recruitment, training, retention, and other staffing practices from the March election and making appropriate adjustments to minimize staffing issues and improve vote center management.
 - d. Improving troubleshooting procedures by increasing communication between vote centers and hosting a dedicated hotline for poll monitors and organizations hosting election hotlines.

- e. Developing systems to track wait times at vote centers and share wait time information on the RR/CC website so voters can make an informed decision on which vote center to visit. This effort should also incorporate plans for the RR/CC to coordinate with election workers, community-based organizations, and local media to redirect voters to other locations if lines form at vote centers.
 - f. Emphasizing vote center hours leading up to and on Election Day in election worker training and vote center signage. These efforts will help minimize attempts to close vote centers early on Election Day, which occurred at several locations in March.
2. **Maximize in-person voting locations, including maintaining the 11-day voting period.** Voting locations should be large enough to accommodate the number of voters anticipated on Election Day while having enough space to allow for social distancing. We support offering drive-through or expanded curbside voting in outdoor spaces where deemed feasible. This not only helps address the issue of having limited indoor locations to choose from, but also reduces the contact points between voters, election workers, and election equipment. These outdoor spaces provide the ample space necessary for social distancing and would increase the vote center's ability to serve larger volumes of voters.
 3. **Continue and expand RR/CC capacity for pop-up voting and flex voting.** These programs brought voting to various communities across the county in the March 2020 election.
 4. **Promote the use of the Interactive Sample Ballot (ISB) to limit voter transaction times.** This will help streamline the voting process for voters and maintain vote center efficiency on the busiest days.
 5. **Prioritize the various criteria required by the VCA in determining the placement of vote centers and dropboxes,** which includes consideration of communities with historically low vote-by-mail participation rates, communities with low vehicle ownership, low-income communities, and eligible but unregistered populations, among other factors.
 6. **Provide one vote center for every city with at least 1,000 registered voters.** This was required according to Section 4007 of the VCA, and although Los Angeles County is no longer required to comply with this provision, it is still a helpful standard to ensure that every Los Angeles County resident has access to in-person voting regardless of the city they live in.
 7. **Initiate a collaborative approach to recruiting election workers and securing vote center locations** that includes the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the 88 cities in Los Angeles County, and the public.
 8. **Develop a strategic plan to recruit and manage election workers.** This plan could include increasing the election worker stipend to incentivize participation and serve as hazard pay. The recruitment of bilingual election workers may warrant extra attention and increased election worker stipends.
 9. **Implement all necessary practices at in-person voting sites to ensure the safety of the public and election workers.** Many of these practices were instituted at vote centers in recent special elections. These safety practices should be publicized before in-person voting begins to indicate to voters that voting in person in Los Angeles County is safe. Safety practices at vote centers could include:
 - a. securing sufficient PPE for election workers and voters;
 - b. using appropriate sanitizing measures for furniture, BMDs, and the in-person voting facility;
 - c. promoting use of the interactive sample ballot to minimize voters' contact with BMDs;
 - d. installing protective plexiglass shields in front of election workers where appropriate; and
 - e. requiring safe social distancing both outside and inside the facility.

Public Education and Engagement

Voter education and engagement will be critical in this upcoming election. Not only are there election changes in response to COVID-19 that need to be communicated to the public, but continued education is also needed on the new elements of the VSAP program, including the ballot marking devices, countywide voting, early voting, and Same Day Voter Registration. Developing and distributing clear public communications that share these changes in an accessible format with translations will be essential. The public engagement that your office conducted with the Vote Center Placement Project helped factor in public input in the selection of vote centers and dropboxes. This engagement is much more difficult now under the pandemic and stay-at-home orders. With restrictions on public gatherings, there are limited opportunities for community meetings and diminished returns on education methods used in March, like bus ads and billboards. A shift in focus to direct mailings and social media campaigns is needed, and partnerships with local governments and community groups are more important than ever.

Some key messages that will need to be emphasized in our voter education include:

- (1) Encouraging voters to verify their voter status and update their voter information on lavote.net or voterstatus.sos.ca.gov as soon as possible.
- (2) Explaining that every voter in the County will receive a ballot by mail they can return by mail, at a dropbox, or at a vote center.
- (3) Promoting vote centers and the services they offer as an option for voters. This should not be presented as a last resort voting option.
- (4) Explaining the health and safety measures that are in place at vote center locations.
- (5) All of the vote-by-mail-specific messages that were listed in #1 in the vote-by-mail section of this letter.

We propose the following to ensure an educated, prepared electorate and an election administration plan that incorporates the needs of Los Angeles County voters:

1. **Increase participation and engagement with members of the VSAP Advisory and Technical Committees, the LAAC, and the VAAC.** Participants in these committees have included community-based organizations familiar with underrepresented voters (CBOs), elections advocates, local political parties, academics, city clerks, and technical experts who are invested in a successful election this fall.
 - a. Engaging these committees in the development and distribution of election materials, including translated materials, will yield strong, effective messaging that reaches all corners of the county.
 - i. In the vote-by-mail implementation report, voter education is planned to begin the second week of July. These committees should be engaged before the voter education campaign launches.
 - b. These committees should also be involved as partners in the recruitment of election workers and vote center locations. This recruitment will be bolstered by the early participation of committee members, who can help by integrating this work with their ongoing community work taking place over the summer and fall.
 - c. If deemed necessary, committees should expand their membership to ensure that as many voices are integrated into the planning process as possible. Increased participation by CBOs, city clerks, as well as representatives from college/university campuses and student populations would assist in the development of effective public messaging as well as the identification of vote center locations.

- d. We propose convening members of the LAAC and VAAC at least twice and the VSAP Advisory Committees monthly leading up to the November elections. If necessary, these committees can be convened simultaneously to minimize the RR/CC's staffing and coordination time needed to host these meetings.
2. **Engage the public on the County's election plan.** This election plan should be amended to incorporate how election administration will be changed for November. The amended plan should include at a minimum, a list of vote center and dropbox locations and hours, plans for making in-person voting safe, and planned education and outreach strategy. The VCA requires a public comment period of at least 30 days if an amended plan is released 120 days before the election. We recommend a minimum public comment period of 15 days if the County releases its amended plan within 120 days of the election. Any public comments that suggest alternative or additional vote centers should be considered and implemented in the final election plan where necessary, particularly if it reflects a broader community need. This process will maintain transparency in election planning and would allow members of the public to give input on the quality and location of vote centers before the locations are finalized.
 3. **Use dedicated funds for public education strategically.**
 - a. Provide funds for community groups to conduct direct voter education and engagement.
 - b. Target voters that are less likely to use vote-by-mail in these communities, including those that face barriers to using vote-by-mail.
 4. **Conduct additional outreach activities and improve educational resources as needed.**
 - a. Post signage at vote centers used in the March 2020 elections, and former polling places if possible, directing voters to the nearest vote center with the vote center name and address clearly listed. This can be executed in partnership with community groups and city clerks across the county.
 - b. Create customizable election materials for cities and trusted partners to use, including one-pagers with a list of vote center and dropbox location and hours customized for a given city, zip code, and/or city council/supervisory district.
 - c. Include information about pop-up and mobile voting options on the Vote Center Locator Tool.

Our organizations appreciate all the work your office has done to improve the voter experience and expand voting opportunities in Los Angeles County. We also would like to thank you for your collaborative and inclusive approach to elections planning that gives voice to Los Angeles County's many communities. We look forward to continuing this collaboration with your office to ensure a successful election this November and in future elections as well.

Sincerely,



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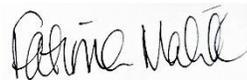
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