PROBLEMS & PROMISE
Assessing Los Angeles County’s New Voting System Rollout in the March 2020 Primary Election
With 36 Recommendations for Improvement

By Kiyana Asemanfar
California Common Cause
July 2020
About Common Cause

Common Cause was founded in 1970 as a vehicle for everyday people to make their voices heard in the political process and to hold their elected leaders accountable to the public interest. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to building a better democracy. We work to create governments at the federal, state, and local levels that are responsive to and reflective of the people they are meant to serve; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all; and help build a democracy that includes everyone.

California Common Cause, Common Cause’s state affiliate, fights for these goals through grassroots organizing, coalition building, policy development, research, public education, legislative advocacy, and litigation. California Common Cause has been at the front lines of several major reforms, including the creation of independent, community-led redistricting in California; money in politics reforms in Los Angeles, Berkeley and elsewhere that lift up the voices of regular people; and voting reforms that have dramatically increased access to the ballot.

Acknowledgments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Los Angeles County overhauled its voting system in California’s March 2020 presidential primary, rolling out a new system that was designed to provide voters more flexibility and convenience than ever before. The new system included same-day voter registration, early voting, countywide voting that permitted voters to cast a ballot at any voting location in the county, and a new ballot marking device that provided enhanced accessibility features to Los Angeles County voters, including voters with disabilities and voters with limited-English proficiency. While the new system, called Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP), provided voters more options in how they cast their ballots, the first use of the system in the March primary was deeply flawed and undermined the convenience that the new system intended to offer.

Our visits to more than 150 Los Angeles County vote centers on Election Day and in the early vote period found technological issues with ePollbooks and ballot marking devices, election workers strained beyond capacity, county help lines and tech support systems that were overwhelmed, and other logistical issues that dramatically impacted the voter experience. On Election Day, issues with ePollbooks led to lines that were over three hours long in some locations.

These failures were unacceptable. We detail them below and provide 36 recommendations for improving the voting system in Los Angeles County for the November 2020 election and beyond.

Los Angeles County took an inclusive and collaborative approach to designing the new voting system. The County’s elections office, known as the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC), solicited input from voters, held countless meetings with community stakeholders prior to Election Day, and even conducted a mock election to test out the system and receive public feedback. We hope the County brings the same spirit of collaboration and continuous improvement in preparing for future elections. We are encouraged that the RR/CC has already proposed and begun implementing a comprehensive plan to address the issues that arose in the March 2020 election.

California Common Cause is dedicated to building a California democracy that includes everyone. We work to build governments at the state and local levels that are reflective of and responsive to the communities they are meant to serve. Part of our mission is voter protection: we operate poll monitoring programs in Southern California in every major election. We will return to Los Angeles County vote centers this fall and hope to see a voting experience that delivers on VSAP’s enormous promise.
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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Access to the Ballot in California

Over the past decade, California has advanced significant election reforms to expand access to the ballot box. Through the passage and implementation of these reforms, California voters have been provided more convenience, flexibility, and choice than ever before when it comes to voting. These reforms include online voter registration, automatic voter registration, the ability to register or re-register to vote up to and on Election Day (also known as same-day registration), and a new election model that counties can opt into under the Voter’s Choice Act (VCA) that expands the number of days and ways in which voters can cast a ballot.

These reforms and others have allowed California to better serve its voters and expand the window for participating in our political process. They have also positioned the state well to respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. For example, California has a well-established vote-by-mail program in place that it plans to expand this fall; all registered voters can expect to be mailed a ballot for the upcoming November 2020 general election, regardless of the county they live in. Voters who return these ballots can track their ballots’ status online and make sure they are counted. And populations that have been displaced by the pandemic can re-register with their new addresses with same-day registration. The March 2020 presidential primary election was a historic election because it was the first in which many of these recent election reforms were in place.

Roughly 47% of the state’s registered voters cast a ballot in the past election, with 72% choosing to return a ballot that was sent to them through the mail instead of visiting an in-person location. While this year’s primary turnout was just shy of the 48% turnout in the 2016 presidential primary election, a higher percentage of California’s eligible voter population cast a ballot at 38%, close to the same turnout of California’s eligible voter population as in the 2008 presidential primary. This number is significant in that it more accurately reflects participation levels by indicating turnout as a percentage of all Californians who are eligible to vote instead of a percentage of just those who are registered to vote.

Of California’s 58 counties, 15 opted to conduct their elections under the VCA: Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Tuolumne. Together, these 15 counties were home to more than 50% of the state’s total electorate, meaning more than half of California’s voters had access to countywide voting at vote centers for 11 days, including Election Day. With the exception of voters in Los Angeles County, voters in these counties automatically received ballots in the mail with the option to return them to a drop box, vote center, or through the mail with postage prepaid.

This was also the first election where same-day registration was provided at all vote centers and polling places across the state. While vote centers in VCA counties had been required to offer same-day registration since their launch in 2018, SB 72, a bill sponsored by California Common Cause, required same-day registration at all voting locations in the state, including polling places, starting in March 2020. With this rule in place, voters could register or update their registration at any voting location across the state leading up to and on Election Day. To build on this requirement, the Legislature enacted SB 207 in February, just weeks before the election, allowing counties to offer voters a streamlined method for making changes to their party preferences or addresses that did not require them to fill out a new voter registration form.
B. About Our Election Protection Work

California Common Cause has anchored the Election Protection program in Southern California in coordination with the nationwide Election Protection Coalition for over a decade. The program is focused on voter empowerment and protection: empowering ordinary citizens to make their voices heard through the democratic process and ensuring that voters are not disenfranchised. We accomplish this goal through three primary methods:

1. Ensuring voter preparedness by educating voters about where and how to cast a ballot;
2. Managing a voter hotline to address voters’ inquiries and escalate reports of issues to county elections offices and the Secretary of State; and
3. Deploying poll monitors throughout Southern California to observe polling place proceedings, report obstacles to voting, and address issues in real time. These issues traditionally include errors in election administration or election worker conduct that either overtly or inadvertently discriminate against voters.

While a significant portion of California Common Cause’s work is focused on developing and implementing public policy that expands voting opportunities and improves the voter experience, voter protection is at the core of our mission. Our Election Protection Hotline helps ensure that voters are informed about their opportunities to vote. Our poll monitor program allows us to support voters and ensure their right to vote until the moment they cast their ballots.

In the 2018 general election, California Common Cause deployed more than 300 poll monitors throughout Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Tulare counties. We also operated two voter protection hotline centers, one in Downtown Los Angeles and another at the University of California, Los Angeles. In the 2018 statewide primary election, California Common Cause observed the launch of the VCA in three of the five counties that piloted the new election model that year and monitored polling places in Los Angeles and Orange counties as well. A report on our findings from that election, with recommendations to address the most common election issues we observed, can be read here.

C. Our Election Protection Work in 2020

In the most recent election, our staff and volunteers monitored the polls in Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, and Santa Clara counties. Our program was primarily focused on the launch of the Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) program in Los Angeles County.

We deployed our poll monitors to more than 150 vote centers in Los Angeles County during the early vote period and Election Day. This report gives an overview of our collective observations based on firsthand accounts from our poll monitors, phone calls from voters on the Election Protection Hotline, and reports shared by our local partners in Los Angeles. This report also shares some of our recommendations for addressing issues that arose in the implementation of VSAP.

While COVID-19 may have played a role in discouraging people from voting in person or following through with their duties as election workers, the pandemic was not widely acknowledged as a public health emergency in Los Angeles County until after Election Day. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose challenges to everyday life, including election administration. In response to the crisis, California Common Cause called for all Los Angeles County voters to receive a vote-by-mail ballot in the November 2020 election. On April
28, 2020, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to enact this change by adopting the same VCA model that the 14 other VCA counties have adopted, ensuring that all Los Angeles County voters receive a ballot by mail beginning in the November 2020 election.

California Common Cause and our partners shared a letter with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC) and Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in May 2020 with specific election recommendations for the November 2020 election in light of the challenges that occurred during the March 2020 primary, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the expanded vote-by-mail program that was announced by the board in April.

We outline additional recommendations in this report. Some of the recommendations we share need to be prioritized to conduct a successful election in November 2020, and many of them overlap with a plan of action already highlighted by Los Angeles County RR/CC in its report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. We acknowledge that some of our recommendations are aspirational and given the current environment should be revisited in future elections that are conducted under more normal circumstances.
II. OVERVIEW OF THE MARCH 2020 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Los Angeles County’s March 2020 primary was a historic election because of the launch of the VSAP program. The program, developed by Los Angeles County over the last decade, brings a reimagined voting experience to Los Angeles County voters. VSAP was designed to offer voters more convenience, flexibility, and choice in when, where, and how they cast their ballots. California Common Cause has served on Los Angeles County’s VSAP Advisory Committee since its inception, helping shape the program’s various elements and ensuring that it would meet the needs of Los Angeles County’s diverse communities.

VSAP integrates all the changes offered by the VCA, paired with a new voting machine known as a ballot marking device (BMD) that enables countywide voting while expanding accessibility and language support to voters. Here is an overview of the changes that VSAP has brought to Los Angeles County elections:

1. **VCA**: A key part of the VSAP program are the offerings of the Voter’s Choice Act. The VCA offers counties in California an alternative to the traditional election model. Under the traditional model, voters can request a vote-by-mail ballot either for a single election or by becoming a permanent vote-by-mail voter. If voters want to vote in person, they can visit their assigned polling places on Election Day, which always falls on a Tuesday. Counties also have the option of offering early voting at additional satellite locations, but there is no standard statewide practice for this. Beginning in 2020, any California county could elect a different election model by opting into the VCA, under which counties accomplish the following:
   
   a. **Establish countywide vote centers**, allowing voters to visit any vote center location in their county to vote in person, receive language assistance, vote on an accessible voting machine, or access same-day registration;
   b. **Expand the voting period**, by opening some vote centers 10 days before Election Day and opening others three days before Election Day; and
   c. **Install drop boxes throughout the county** for convenient vote-by-mail ballot return. With the establishment of vote centers, Los Angeles County voters had the opportunity to register to vote and cast a ballot at any location in the county over an 11-day voting period.

2. **Electronic Pollbooks (ePollbooks)**: In the March primary, Los Angeles County replaced the traditional paper rosters that list the registered voters in a given precinct with ePollbooks. These tablet-size devices are electronic versions of the traditional paper roster, allowing voter information to be accessed and updated in real time. The ePollbooks are used to check voters in, determine the correct ballot type for voters, and update the county voter registration database to reflect voter activity. This technology makes it much easier for voters to be issued a regular ballot instead of a provisional ballot, particularly for vote-by-mail voters who, under the old system, needed to surrender their vote-by-mail ballot in order to vote with a regular ballot. With ePollbooks, election workers can verify that a voter has not voted already, in which case they can issue the voter a regular, non-provisional ballot. The ePollbooks are also used to conduct same-day registration. After being checked in, voters are issued a blank paper ballot with a customized QR code that is printed on the spot to indicate their ballot type, determined by their precinct and party preference. This system is referred to as ballot-on-demand, where voters’ ballots are generated upon check-in, as compared to having pre-printed ballots at the voting location. The ePollbooks and this ballot-on-demand system…
are enabling technology used by VCA counties that allow voters to receive their correct ballot for their precinct at any vote center in their county.

3. **BMDs:** For years, Los Angeles County voters used InkaVote, a voting system that required voters to mark a non-human-readable scantron ballot with a special pen. In March, Los Angeles County replaced the InkaVote voting system with a new ballot marking device, a touch-screen device that allows voters to view, mark, and cast their ballots. This device was developed in a user-centered approach, incorporating real Los Angeles County voters’ needs into the product design. Voters, upon receiving a paper ballot with their customized QR code at check-in, load their ballots into the BMD. The BMD reads the QR code and allows voters to view their ballots on the touch screen and make their selections. Once voters are done making their selections, the BMD prints them out onto the paper ballots. The voters then have an opportunity to review their ballots before casting them with the click of a button. The paper ballots are then automatically fed back through the BMD into a ballot box that is integrated on the back of the BMD. The Los Angeles County BMD offers built-in accessibility features, including an audio ballot, adjustable font size and contrast, and adjustable device height and angle. It also has the option to display the ballot in 13 languages offered to Los Angeles County voters under federal and state law. The BMD’s accessibility features make voting more convenient while maintaining election security with a paper-based system. To view an example of a voter’s interaction with Los Angeles County’s BMD, [view this short YouTube video created by the RR/CC](https://example.com).

4. **Interactive Sample Ballot (ISB):** Los Angeles County launched the ISB alongside the new BMD as an optional feature to help streamline the voting process and save voters time at the vote center. Similarly to the traditional sample ballot, also known as the county voter information guide, the ISB al-
allows voters to preview their ballots. More significantly, it allows voters to make their ballot selections on their phones, tablets, or computers before visiting a vote center. The ISB generates a QR code containing the voter’s selections, which a voter then brings with them to the vote center. The voter can scan this QR code at the BMD, allowing the BMD to load the voter’s preselected ballot selections and display them on the screen. The voter can review the selections again and make changes to them as needed before printing and casting the ballot. The RR/CC has made a one-minute information video on the ISB available on YouTube.

5. New Vote-by-Mail Experience: Another feature of VSAP is a redesign of the vote-by-mail materials. These elements were implemented in the 2018 midterm election, earlier than the rest of the program elements. The previous vote-by-mail design required voters to refer to a ballot booklet and make their selections by filling out bubbles on a separate scantron. The County adopted a new vote-by-mail ballot design similar to the one used by some other California counties to streamline the voting experience at home. This new vote-by-mail ballot allows voters to view their ballot and make their selections on full-face ballot cards that are available in the multiple languages offered by Los Angeles County.

The new vote-by-mail ballot design offers a streamlined ballot for voters to make their selections. The “I Voted” sticker was also redesigned in 2018 to feature the 13 languages offered in Los Angeles County.
In addition to the launch of VSAP, this past election cycle saw several other changes in Los Angeles County. This includes the consolidation of Los Angeles City Municipal Elections with statewide elections, meaning Los Angeles city residents voted on federal, state, and local races on a single ballot for the first time. As a result of the consolidation, Los Angeles County tested a new ballot order: local races first, then state, then federal races in a pilot program intended to minimize the drop-off on down-ballot races and to encourage voters to vote on local races. The pilot program will continue for the next few elections, after which Los Angeles County will issue a report with the results.

A. Data on Los Angeles County Voting History

Los Angeles County Turnout and Vote-by-Mail Participation

* This includes ballots sent to voters by mail that were returned by mail or were dropped off at a drop box or vote center.

The 2020 Presidential Primary Election marked the highest vote-by-mail participation in Los Angeles County’s recent history.

B. Positive Highlights From the Election

Long lines and wait times dominated the narrative on Election Day in Los Angeles County. There were issues with new election technology that posed challenges to election workers and voters. Some vote centers were not equipped with sufficient staff and resources to serve voters on opening day. Other locations were lacking in signage or convenient parking. Together, these issues and others amounted to unacceptable failures, causing significant inconveniences to voters and leading some to abandon voting altogether. These issues are documented later in the report.

The rollout of VSAP did have positive highlights, however. These highlights are worth acknowledging, celebrating, and reinforcing in future elections.
1. **The BMD offered Los Angeles County voters a range of accessibility features.** The features of the BMD include adjustable height, contrast and color, and font size, as well as an audio ballot interface with keypad. These features allowed all voters, including people with disabilities, to have a customized voting experience that met their needs. Our partners at Disability Rights California were pleased to share with us that they did not receive any accessibility complaints about the new BMD during the election, a major improvement compared to prior elections conducted under the InkaVote system. The BMD also allowed Los Angeles County voters to access their ballots in 13 languages, including Armenian, Chinese, English, Farsi, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese. These features of the BMD allowed more populations to vote privately and independently. BMDs did experience issues, however, including paper jams and voters who were unclear about how to cast their ballots. These issues are described later in this report.

2. **The RR/CC offered innovative, flexible options for voting.** Los Angeles County developed and employed creative ways to reach voters and expand voting opportunities. Five vote center locations were open for extended hours, offering 24-hour voting beginning the Monday before Election Day through the close of polls at 8 p.m. on Election Day. Mobile voting units and flex vote centers were used to add voting capacity throughout the county by bringing voting to population centers and voters with specific needs, including people experiencing homelessness, senior populations, incarcerated voters, and voters with disabilities. The mobile units were employed at two to three locations every day of the voting period, at malls, farmers' markets, and attractions such as the Santa Monica Pier and Aquarium of the Pacific. The RR/CC also allowed organizations to apply to host a flex vote center at their facilities; senior living centers, community service centers, and churches all served as flex vote centers during the voting period. This was a creative, community-driven approach to voting that further accommodated Los Angeles County voters' wide range of voting needs and preferences.

3. **The 11-day voting period expanded the voting window for voters.** The extended voting period allowed voters to cast their ballots at any vote center in the county up to 10 days before Election Day. More than one in four voters who cast a ballot in person opted to cast their ballots at a vote center before Election Day, while 73% of ballots cast in person were cast on Election Day. Because of the unique dynamics of the presidential primary this cycle, with candidates dropping out of the race within days of Election Day, it's likely that many voters waited for last-minute developments in the presidential race before casting their ballots. While low participation in the early vote period is a common trend in VCA counties that implemented an 11-day voting period for the first time, Los Angeles County voters may have voted early at higher rates than voters in other counties that implemented the VCA. According to a Center for Inclusive Democracy (formerly the California Civic Engagement Project) report on the VCA's launch in 2018, “Vote Centers and Ballot Drop Box Locations in every VCA county saw low numbers for in-person voting and voters dropping off VBM ballots during the initial phase of early voting prior to Election Day, with a sharp increase in participation during the final two to three days prior to Election Day and on Election Day.” For instance, 89% of ballots cast in person in the June 2018 primary election in San Mateo County were cast on Election Day, according to the same report. In future election cycles, and with increased public education dedicated to advertising the early vote period, we anticipate that more Los Angeles County voters will take advantage of the additional days that are offered to them.
4. **Los Angeles County significantly exceeded the vote center requirement set by state law.** The County established close to 1,000 vote centers, more locations than were required by law. The VCA sets a floor for the number of 11-day and four-day vote centers that Los Angeles County needed to offer voters. Los Angeles County was required to offer one vote center for every 30,000 registered voters in the 11-day voting period and one for every 7,500 registered voters in the four-day voting period—more than what was required for other counties that adopted the VCA—because of its historically higher rates of in-person voting and because Los Angeles County did not provide a vote-by-mail ballot to every registered voter in the county. By offering nearly 980 vote centers, the RR/CC exceeded their higher requirement. The County set a goal of establishing 1,000 vote centers for Los Angeles County voters, which they came very close to but didn’t quite meet.

5. **Training and systems were in place to help strengthen vote center operations.** Our poll monitors observed various practices that helped minimize processing times and improve the voter experience at some vote centers. These practices were improved vote center operations during our observation. These practices include the following:
   a. Election workers stated, “This is your ballot” when handing a voter the customized paper ballot to remind the voter that the paper served as the ballot and that the BMD does not record votes;
   b. Election workers instructed voters to use the “cast ballot” button after their ballot selections were printed at the BMD to ensure that their ballots were cast successfully;
   c. Election workers advised voters to use the “More” button, a feature of the BMD that allows voters to scroll down and see all the candidates on the ballot for a given race;
   d. Election workers used placards with the word “Next,” indicating to the next voter in line that they were available to assist with check-in;
   e. Vote center leads ran election workers through training exercises during downtime; and
   f. Election workers who had been working at 11-day vote centers were deployed to four-day vote centers.

When vote centers became busier and issues with ePollbooks escalated, some of these good practices broke down, as election workers focused their efforts on troubleshooting and accommodating voters. These practices should continue to be reinforced in future election worker training.

6. **Student election workers were valuable members of the vote center staff.** Young election workers were knowledgeable, confident, and successful in navigating election technology. In one location we monitored, the high school election workers were assigned to the check-in station, using ePollbook and ballot-on-demand technology to check voters in and issue ballots. These election workers were among the most technologically fluent staff members. They were able to look up voters efficiently and troubleshoot issues with voter registration.

7. **Vote centers were well-equipped with bilingual election workers.** Every location that we visited, except one, had multiple bilingual election workers who could provide language support to voters. This demonstrated the County’s commitment to serve its limited-English-proficient populations. While many locations offered support in a range of languages, there is a question of whether the bilingual election workers were appropriately assigned to vote centers to serve the populations in the surrounding communities most effectively.

8. **The County’s general community-driven approach to conducting elections allowed the public to give input in the election planning process.** The RR/CC initiated a collaborative, community-driven
approach to identifying vote center locations for the 2020 elections with the Vote Center Placement Project. Los Angeles County significantly exceeded the VCA’s public outreach requirements by hosting more than 60 community meetings, in partnership with local community groups, to educate the public about VSAP and solicit feedback on vote center locations. The RR/CC also hosted an online platform where residents could submit recommendations for locations to serve as vote centers or provide comments with additional feedback on vote center locations that were submitted by others. This public outreach was factored into additional data analysis and field visits to create a database of 2,000 suggested vote center locations. This methodology and the list of the 2,000 suggested locations are detailed in the county’s Election Administration Plan. We acknowledge that public input is one factor to consider in determining vote center locations and that, ultimately, state requirements and facility availability dictate which vote center locations are used. Approximately 70% of the vote centers used in the March 2020 election came from the list of the 2,000 suggested vote center locations, which was informed by public input.

C. Poll Monitor and Hotline Data

Overview:
- 153 vote centers visited by Common Cause staff, partners, and volunteers
- 67 vote centers visited during the early vote period
- 86 vote centers visited on Election Day
- 339 calls fielded from California voters on the national Election Protection Hotline

As part of our poll monitoring efforts, we collected information at vote centers on parking, accessibility, election workers, language support, ePollbooks, BMDs, long lines, and whether vote centers opened later or attempted to close early. The following is an overview of the issues that were the most prominent at Los Angeles County vote centers. This information combines our data collected during the early vote period and Election Day, with roughly 56% of the data reflecting Election Day observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLL MONITOR</th>
<th>Parking</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Election Workers</th>
<th>Language Access</th>
<th>Long Lines</th>
<th>ePollbooks</th>
<th>Ballot Marking Device</th>
<th>Late Poll Opening*</th>
<th>Early Poll Closing*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Vote Centers with Issue</td>
<td>52 of 153</td>
<td>4 of 105</td>
<td>18 of 105</td>
<td>9 of 105</td>
<td>38 of 153</td>
<td>30 of 105</td>
<td>49 of 153</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Vote Centers with Issue</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all vote centers were assessed by our poll monitors for accessibility, pollworker conduct, language access, and ePollbook issues, which is why the denominators in the percentages are different based on issue category.

*Late poll openings and early poll closures are listed as a total number rather than percentage because these issues are only relevant at certain times of the day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOTLINE</th>
<th>Parking</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Election Workers</th>
<th>Language Access</th>
<th>Long Line</th>
<th>ePollbooks</th>
<th>Ballot Marking Device</th>
<th>Late Poll Opening</th>
<th>Early Poll Closing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reports of Issue on Hotline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue % of Total Calls**</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** 28 calls were made to the Election Protection hotline reporting issues with Los Angeles County vote centers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMBINED POLL MONITOR AND HOTLINE</th>
<th>Parking</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Election Workers</th>
<th>Language Access</th>
<th>Long Lines</th>
<th>ePollbooks</th>
<th>Ballot Marking Device</th>
<th>Late Poll Opening</th>
<th>Early Poll Closing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Reports of Issue</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here is how we defined each issue area:

**Parking:** Vote centers with parking issues (a) did not have convenient parking options, (b) only had street parking, and/or (c) had insufficient parking at the time of our observation.

**Accessibility:** Vote centers with accessibility issues (a) did not have a clear pathway to the door and/or (b) did not provide a ramp for wheelchair accessibility where needed.

**Election Workers:** Vote centers with election worker issues were (a) understaffed and had difficulties meeting voter demand at the time of our observation and/or (b) had at least one identified election worker who demonstrated a lack of professionalism.

**Language Support:** Vote centers with language support issues (a) had an insufficient number of bilingual election workers, (b) had bilingual election workers who were not wearing nametags identifying their language skills, and/or (c) had a lack of translated informational election materials.

**ePollbooks:** Vote centers with ePollbook issues reported slowdowns at the check-in process.

**BMDs:** Vote centers with BMD issues had either (a) reported multiple BMDs that were out of service or (b) a voter experienced a paper jam at the BMD during our observation.

**Long Lines:** Vote centers that were marked as having long lines had wait times that exceeded 30 minutes during our time of observation.

**Early Poll Closure:** Vote centers with election workers who announced that voting would conclude at 8 p.m. on Election Day or sent voters who were in line by 8 p.m. away from the vote center. Under California state law, voting locations are required to serve all voters who are in line by 8 p.m.

**Late Poll Opening:** Vote centers were late to open on their first day.

**D. Overview of Key Problems**

While the VSAP program’s offerings in concept provide voters unmatched convenience and flexibility, the implementation of the program was extremely bumpy, and the problems ultimately outshone its strengths. This manifested in several ways:

- Syncing issues with ePollbooks slowed the check-in process down to unreasonable speeds, leading to hours-long lines at multiple locations on Election Day.
- BMDs broke down or had paper jams and issues with the machines were not efficiently addressed.
- Vote center locations were not all finalized in the weeks leading up to the voting period, leading to inconsistencies between the list of vote center locations mailed to voters and the online Vote Center Locator Tool, which is where the public could access both a list and map of available vote centers in the county.
- The County’s capacity for fielding reports and troubleshooting was overwhelmed closer to Election Day, leaving voters and some election workers unassisted.

These were among other issues raised during and after the voting period. We detail them further next. After the election, the Board of Supervisors requested a formal report from the RR/CC on issues that they experienced or received reports about. The RR/CC’s postelection board report released on April 27, 2020, outlines the cause of these issues and an action plan to address them. The Board of Supervisors also requested a third-party review of the March election. An executive summary of this third-party review was
released in June 2020, affirming the findings and action plan outlined in the RR/CC’s report and building on that report with additional recommendations. We provide details on the issues faced by voters and the County in the March 2020 primary election below.

1. Check-in and ePollbooks

   The check-in process served as a universal bottleneck at vote centers. This slowdown at the check-in process was the main reason long lines formed on Election Day. Despite the fact that a number of BMDs were inoperable, the BMDs that were available were still not being fully used at any given time because voters were not being checked in quickly enough. This indicated that issues with ePollbooks and the check-in process were the main contributors to inefficient vote center operations. From the data our poll monitors collected, 30% of vote center locations visited had reported issues with ePollbooks. Next, we provide greater detail on the key issues we observed with the check-in process.

   a. At times, particularly on Election Day, issues with ePollbooks prevented election workers from efficiently checking voters in. The ePollbooks are connected to the county voter database and require syncing with that database and between ePollbook devices to reflect the most up-to-date voter activity. According to the RR/CC report, this syncing process was lengthy, particularly if the ePollbook device was turned on for the first time on Election Day; in this case, ePollbooks had to be updated with all voter activity that had taken place over the voting period. This process could take several hours, and in some cases the ePollbooks never finished syncing. In the absence of up-to-date voter information, the ePollbooks classified every voter as a required provisional voter because it could not verify whether the voter had already voted. This feature is a fail-safe that helped prevent voting from grinding to a halt, but it slowed down the process and upset voters who wished to vote by regular ballot.

   b. Some vote centers were not equipped with enough ePollbooks to check voters in. The “petite” vote centers, described in more detail further below, offered five BMDs and were equipped with only two ePollbooks, while other vote centers had as few as three or four ePollbook devices. When voters
were completing more lengthy operations with an ePollbook, such as same-day registration or requesting a crossover ballot, processing times increased. This lack of sufficient equipment, coupled with slow ePollbook functionality, slowed the check-in process to rates that were detrimental to vote center operations and effectively disenfranchised voters, the extent of which is still unknown.

c. Election workers experienced difficulties working with ePollbooks, either because of slow functionality or a lack of sufficient training. In particular, the process of spoiling and reissuing a ballot was painfully slow and complicated. We observed one voter who needed to be reissued a ballot after his ballot was jammed in the BMD. The process of reissuing him a ballot took so long that he eventually left the vote center without voting. In another case, a voter who needed to spoil a previous ballot and receive a new one waited roughly half an hour to be reissued a ballot. After some time, election workers realized that this function could only be conducted on the same ePollbook device that the voter originally checked in on—a requirement that was unknown to them. We also observed that in some cases, vote center leads were the only election workers who were knowledgeable enough to troubleshoot and complete complicated ePollbook functions, while other election workers were not as confident handling these issues. Improvement of ePollbook functionality as well as increased hands-on training, strengthened cross-training, and an expansion of the high school election worker program could all help ensure efficient check-in processing at vote centers in the future.

d. Some voters who reportedly registered to vote before the deadline and/or confirmed their voter registration were not found on the rolls when checking in. The availability of same-day registration at every vote center provided an immediate fix to this issue but added to delays.

e. The ballot-on-demand printer, which prints voters’ customized QR codes onto their ballots, sometimes issued QR codes that were faded and could not be read by the BMDs when voters loaded their ballots into the machine. We also observed election workers issuing misaligned ballots after inserting the ballots into the printer at an angle. Additional attention on and reinforcement of the printing process could be necessary.

The various complications with the check-in process served as a choke point that led to lines. We collected data from poll monitors at more than 40 locations after 5:30 p.m. on Election Day. These monitors were looking to estimate wait times at the locations they visited. The following chart gives a breakdown of the wait times that were determined at those locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wait Times at or after 5:30 PM on Election Day</th>
<th>Less than 30 minutes</th>
<th>30 min – 1 hour wait</th>
<th>1+ hour wait</th>
<th>2+ hour wait</th>
<th>2.5 hour+ wait</th>
<th>Total Sites Visited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Locations with Reported Wait Time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Locations Visited</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data indicates that on election night, three out of every five vote centers had a wait time that exceeded 30 minutes, the acceptable threshold for wait times set by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration. More than half of the vote centers that we visited had a wait time that exceeded one hour.

In an effort to address long lines, the RR/CC and local media made efforts to redirect voters to locations that had minimal wait times on Election Day. This was done by advertising the list of locations with minimal wait times on social media and in news articles. For future election cycles, developing a
system to track and publicize wait times at each vote center can help redirect traffic from busy vote centers as well as allow voters to make an informed decision about which vote center location to visit.

2. Ballot Marking Devices

While the ballot marking device (BMD) was a vast improvement from the past InkaVote system, there were technical issues with the machines that left some BMDs inoperable during the voting period. Of all the vote centers we visited, roughly 32% had at least one reported BMD that was experiencing issues. Of the 28 hotline calls we received, 21% were reporting issues with BMDs.

a. BMDs experienced paper jams when voters inserted or cast their ballots. This required election workers to support voters and reissue them their ballots, as well as additional attention from troubleshooters who were responsible for fixing the machines. At multiple vote centers, BMDs were labeled as out of service either as a result of a paper jam that had not been resolved or other issues that we were not able to identify. For example, just one hour after the opening of the Central American Resource Center vote center in Koreatown, three out of the 20 BMDs were inoperable and marked out of service.

While the County had systems in place to fix these BMDs, demand for repairs seemed to exceed the County’s capacity to address the breakdowns. Some machines were never fixed, even if they were reported during the first week of voting. The RR/CC outlines the steps their office has already undertaken to address the issues with BMDs in their postelection board report mentioned earlier.

b. Some voters did not understand that the paper they were issued served as their actual ballot and that the BMD, which assists the voter in marking the ballots, does not actually record votes. We observed one voter ask an election worker if the ballot was his receipt and whether he could leave with it. Other voters left their BMD and looked for a separate ballot box in which to cast their ballot, not knowing the stand-alone ballot box used in prior years had been integrated with the BMDs. In some cases, voters departed the vote center with their ballots in hand or without having cast their ballots. This required some election workers to follow up with the voters to ensure that they cast their ballots before leaving, but it is not clear if the election workers caught all
of these cases. If too much time had passed between when the voter left the BMD and returned to cast the ballot, the session timed out, requiring further assistance to cast the voter’s ballot.

This lack of understanding is a natural transition issue that the RR/CC attempted to mitigate. As mentioned earlier in this report, election workers were trained to say, “This is your ballot” when issuing voters their ballot to reinforce the paper ballot concept. This could be further addressed through increased education and revised product design. The RR/CC could modify the BMD screen by implementing a pulse or flashing feature, additional colors, and/or sound effects to ensure that voters do not leave the BMD without successfully casting their ballots. Some ideas for modifying the product interface have already been proposed in the RR/CC report.

c. Some voters were concerned that others could watch them making their ballot selections on the BMD screen. A review of suggested BMD arrangement in the vote center layout and the consideration of additional privacy mechanisms could be helpful so that voters can be more comfortable making their ballot selections at the BMD.

3. Vote Center Selection, Placement, and Logistics

While Los Angeles County offered a significantly higher number of vote centers than it was required to, there were issues with the distribution and selection of vote centers across the county, as well as problems with getting the vote centers up and running on the first day of voting.

a. The distribution of vote centers across the county was not always ideal. Some vote centers were sited too close to each other, meaning each vote center was not extending meaningful voting opportunities to Los Angeles County voters. One of our observers noted two vote centers that were directly across the street from each other: Alpine Recreation Center and Castelar Elementary School in Chinatown. While Los Angeles County’s total number of vote centers exceeded the state requirement, nonpurposeful vote center placement, as demonstrated in this example, unnecessarily strained resources and undercut the value of having a high number of sites. Alpine Recreation Center was incredibly popular during our time of observation on Election Day, but the facility offered a smaller room instead of the larger gym, which would have been a better fit for serving voters. For an unidentified reason, perhaps because of community preference, the more spacious Castelar Elementary School vote center located across the street was less used by voters. The RR/CC should ensure that vote centers are strategically distributed throughout the county to expand voting opportunities for Los Angeles County communities.
b. Not all vote centers were ideal for various reasons, including lack of space, lack of parking, or other general reasons. Some vote centers were incredibly small in square footage, which meant that they could only offer a limited number of BMDs. There were as few as five BMDs in some locations identified in the postelection report as “petite” vote centers, which constituted 15% of all vote centers offered in the March election. While these vote centers were smaller than what we expected, it is possible that these locations were selected to provide voting access to communities that otherwise may not have had a vote center and because higher square footage locations were unavailable in the area. Despite these good intentions, some of the petite vote centers were inundated on Election Day and unfit to serve the communities that turned out to vote. Ace Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles was one notable location: a petite vote center that did not have enough capacity to meet the demand for voting in that area. More consideration should be given to select vote center locations that can meet anticipated voter demand in a given community. The number of ePollbooks, BMDs, and staff members should also all be proportional to each other and should match the expected voter turnout at that location on Election Day, which remains the most popular day to vote in person.

Vote centers did not always have widely available parking. According to data collected by our poll monitors, 34% of vote centers we monitored were identified as having insufficient or inconvenient parking options. Some locations had nearby parking lots that were not clearly identified as voter parking, leaving voters unclear as to where to park. This included schools, which often had parking lots that were either full or closed to voters, leaving voters to search for street parking in order to cast a ballot. Other locations had street parking only, which at times was metered, requiring voters to pay. Facilities that traditionally charge a fee for parking also were problematic; we detail this issue more fully in a later section. In general, parking was sometimes a challenge for our poll monitors, meaning it was a challenge for voters as well. In selecting vote centers, parking availability should be a strong consideration, particularly in areas where most voters will drive to the vote center. In making preparations, arrangements should be made to secure and identify parking for voters.

We acknowledge that identifying nearly 1,000 locations that are available to serve as vote centers for the minimum four-day period and that also meet the requirements for a voting location is no simple task. The RR/CC demonstrated a commitment to getting the placement and selection of vote centers right in the March 2020 election through the Vote Center Placement Project. Ultimately, they were constrained by the strict accessibility, electric, and security requirements and the availability of the venues identified by their partners and the public. We encourage increased collaboration among cities, the County, and other partners to identify and secure spaces that are better fit to serve as vote centers with ample parking, sufficient space to accommodate voters, and other features that make voting in person more accessible.

c. The opening of vote centers was not a smooth process at some locations. Several vote centers that we observed on opening day (either the first or second Saturday before Election Day, depending on the specific vote center schedule) had difficulty opening on time for a range of reasons. Insufficient staffing was one potential cause. In some cases, the vote center lead was not present at the scheduled opening time, which was problematic because the lead had the necessary knowledge and resources to open the vote center. In other cases, the vote centers were not equipped with the proper technology and materials, including ballots, due to issues with resource deployment. We received reports that some vote centers were having significant issues and took several hours to get up and running. In extreme cases, it took a day or two for the
vote center to be properly running to serve voters. At the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Mall, voters lined up on the last Saturday before Election Day to cast their ballots. The vote center was not ready to serve voters at the 8 a.m. opening time because it was not properly set up. Voters who waited in line ended up leaving without casting a ballot; the vote center did not begin processing voters until later that afternoon. We recommend further analysis to clarify what the causes were for vote centers failing to open on time.

These delays served as a major inconvenience to voters who planned to vote during the early vote period. It erodes trust in the voting process and could also further cement public preference to vote on Election Day after early vote issues are worked out. Logistical fine-tuning is needed to ensure vote centers open on time and serve voters at the advertised opening time.

d. Facility policies were inconsistent and did not always meet expected standards. At Bob Hope Patriotic Hall, our poll monitor had to go through a metal detector and bag search before entering the facility, which voters should not be subjected to in order to visit a vote center. At that same location, upon our poll monitor’s return to the parking lot, he noticed that the lot closed at 4:30 p.m., 30 minutes before voting would conclude at the location.

Our poll monitors also visited several locations that were charging visitors for parking. Voters should not be expected to pay to access a vote center. During our observation in the early vote period, the Dockweiler Beach location was charging voters for parking. We reported this issue and it was addressed immediately. At other locations, particularly college campuses, there was no signage to indicate that parking was free, which left our poll monitors confused about whether they should pay and if they would be ticketed if they did not pay. Questions about whether bathrooms would be made available to voters was also an issue.

It is important that in their communications with facilities, the RR/CC clarify clear expectations for vote center policies that need to be in place to ensure a level of standardization in vote centers across the county.

e. The amount and type of signage at vote centers could be improved. The large blue feather signs were often posted right at the entrance of the vote centers but were not visible from the street. These blue feather signs should also be placed on the street to capture the attention of passersby and to help guide voters to the vote center. The signage within certain facilities, particularly college campuses, was often lacking, which meant that our poll monitors had to ask others where voting was taking place. Some venues had signage directing voters to a door that was locked, giving our poll monitors the impression that the vote center had not opened yet.

A blue feather sign outside the vote center at Artesia Library.
Problems & Promise

Signage should always be ample and clear, directing the voters from the street entrance to the correct building, floor, and room where voting is taking place and leading voters to the precise entrance of the vote center.

f. The voting hours were standardized across the county, which advanced public understanding of when vote centers would be open; however, consideration of modified early vote hours could be beneficial in future election cycles. Los Angeles County established an early vote schedule of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., exceeding the state requirement for vote centers to be open at least eight hours a day, with the exception of Election Day when the hours are set statewide at 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. It is unclear how well these early vote hours served voters, particularly voters working traditional hours, or whether alternative hours could better support increased early vote participation. As described earlier, five vote centers offered extended voting hours through Monday night, the night before Election Day, to accommodate populations with traditional working hours. It would be worthwhile to explore other early vote hours that exceed the eight-hour minimum requirement, perhaps additional evening hours, to help accommodate voters who want to cast their ballots before Election Day.

4. Staffing

Staff recruitment, training, and deployment affected efficiency of vote center operations. They also affected the voter experience.

a. At times, we observed moments of high tension and disagreement between election workers. While this is likely the natural product of running a high-stakes, high-stress operation with technological challenges and frustrated voters, there is at least some evidence that recruitment practices contributed to the tension. Some election workers disclosed that additional election workers were recruited the final weekend before Election Day. In an attempt to meet demand, bonuses were issued as an incentive to election workers employed in the eleventh hour. This appears to have caused tension with some of the other election workers who did not receive a bonus. According to some of our poll monitors, this frustration in pay disparity may have been a reason for some tension between election workers.

b. Some vote centers were overstaffed with idle election workers, while other locations had minimal staff. For example, one vote center at a school in Monterey Park had only five BMDs with 10 election workers, while a large vote center in Monrovia with dozens of BMDs had only five poll workers. It is possible that these staffing inconsistencies were related to the unexpected absence of some election workers. We observed efforts to redistribute election workers throughout the voting period to adjust for staffing demands, demonstrating a level of flexibility and responsiveness on behalf of the RR/CC to adjust to issues in real time.

c. Not all election workers were confident or well versed in the election technology they were required to operate. As mentioned earlier, vote centers were overly dependent on the vote center lead to complete complex processes, such as starting BMDs or troubleshooting issues with ePollbooks. Strengthened hands-on training practices for all election workers, particularly related to new election technology, could be effective in addressing this issue.

Our poll monitors observed that younger poll workers were able to navigate election technology with greater ease than others. We recommend that additional young people, including high school students, be recruited to work as election workers. The high school election workers at
Lafayette Recreation Center were assigned to the check-in station during the weekend voting period but had to return to school during the weekday. Options for retaining high school election workers should be explored. Having these technologically proficient students serving voters, particularly on Election Day, would serve to strengthen vote center operations and give the students a valuable, real-world experience in the civic process.

d. We received reports of election worker conduct that was in conflict with California election law. One issue was regarding the ePollbook scanning process that allows election workers to use a voter’s sample ballot, driver’s license, or ID card to check a voter in instead of looking them up manually. Some election workers incorrectly demanded voters’ IDs to check them in instead of presenting it as an option, violating California voter ID law which only requires voters to present ID in specific situations. Using a sample ballot or ID to check in should be clearly presented as an option that is not mandatory.

We also received six calls from voters on election night reporting that election workers were attempting to close vote centers at 8 p.m. These election workers were either actively sending voters away or announced that voting would conclude at 8 p.m. California election law requires that voting locations serve all voters who are in line by the close of polls. Additional emphasis on California election law in the election worker training curriculum is necessary, and additional signage that reminds voters of their rights should also be considered.

e. We observed that vote centers were very well staffed with bilingual election workers, but improvements can be made both in the distribution of bilingual election workers and in making the available language support clear to voters. Of the 100-plus vote centers we visited over the course of the voting period, all but one had bilingual election workers on staff. At times, it was unclear whether bilingual election workers were strategically deployed throughout the county. For example, there were only two Chinese-speaking election workers at a busy vote center in Monterey Park, a city with a significant Chinese American population. The two Chinese-speaking election workers at this vote center were in high demand at times, leading to higher wait times. Another vote center in El Monte had Chinese- and Vietnamese-speaking election workers but only one Spanish-speaking election worker available to serve a city where nearly 30% of the citizen voting age population identifies as limited-English proficient and speaks Spanish at home.

Mr. Kim, a bilingual election worker at the Echo Park Recreation Center in Los Angeles, served as a line monitor and offered Korean language support to voters.
Another issue with language support was how well its availability was indicated to voters. While bilingual election workers had nametags identifying their names and the language(s) they spoke, the nametags were not translated. Providing translated nametags that can be read by limited-English proficient voters will help ensure that nametags are helpful to voters who need language assistance.

5. Troubleshooting Systems

The County’s call center was responsive to reports early in the voting period. In one case, we reported an issue with excessive building security measures at the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall in Downtown Los Angeles, as described earlier. The RR/CC hotline staff returned our call to learn more details and ask follow-up questions about our report. They discussed the situation with us in detail and indicated that they would follow up with the facility about our reported issue. In another case, we called the RR/CC to report that paid parking was required at the Dockweiler Youth Center. The issue was addressed immediately and a new sign indicating that parking was free was put up while our poll monitor was still at the vote center.

a. The call center became overburdened later in the voting period as more vote centers opened and more issues took place. The call center lacked the capacity to fulfill the extreme demand for support across vote centers that increased closer to Election Day. Vote center leads told our poll monitors that the wait time for support was untenable. Some election workers shared stories of waiting on the support line for over an hour, only to be disconnected. One lead at a vote center in Alhambra said that he simply gave up on calling support because issues at the voter center were numerous and the line to vote was too long to have staff held up on the phone. Expanding the hotline capacity in Los Angeles County is an important step moving forward. We observed election workers across locations who contacted each other when questions arose, effectively helping each other address issues at the vote centers. Exploring the creation of communication channels between vote centers could help minimize the demand for County assistance, particularly for smaller issues and clarification questions that can be easily addressed by other election workers. This could supplement an expansion of the county call center.

b. One constant observation across the county was insufficient technical support to address BMD and ePollbook issues. Some vote center leads shared with our poll monitors that they waited days before technical support arrived to fix broken BMDs. In some cases, the tech support never arrived. A vote center lead at a retirement facility in Arcadia revealed that more than half of their 40 BMDs were down on the morning of Election Day. Even after technical support showed up to repair them, more than a dozen remained down for the rest of the day. The RR/CC has already proposed improving technical support capacity in the postelection report.

6. Public Education

The VSAP program unveiled an ambitious package of changes to a system that had largely remained the same for years, if not decades. Successfully educating voters, including both traditional and new voters, in a county as large and diverse as Los Angeles County is a huge undertaking.

a. Despite the County’s investment in voter outreach and education, the early vote period was underused. While most billboards and bus ads emphasized the new BMDs and included the new voting period dates, they may not have effectively communicated the new concept of early
voting and countywide voting to Los Angeles County voters. Additional promotion of early vote will effectively communicate voters’ options for voting and could increase early vote turnout.

b. Inaccuracies in online and print election materials caused voters confusion. The online and print list of vote centers had discrepancies: some locations listed in the mailed booklet were not listed on the online Vote Center Locator Tool and vice versa. We observed a handful of locations on the online tool that had typos in their addresses. It took one of our poll monitors 15 minutes to find an incorrectly listed address for a vote center in El Monte. Another vote center in San Gabriel that was not listed in the countywide mailed booklet was listed on the Secretary of State’s website, presumably a vote center location that was secured after the booklet was mailed out.

We also encountered at least two voters who shared that they received an email from the RR/CC saying that their vote-by-mail ballots had not been returned yet. When we helped them check the RR/CC’s online ballot verification tool, it showed that their ballots had been received and processed. This communication caused concern and led these voters to visit their vote center. Increased attention and sensitivity around public communications is needed to ensure that voters receive accurate elections information.

c. With nearly 1,000 vote center locations in the county, navigating the list of vote centers could be overwhelming to voters. While the Vote Center Locator Tool helped voters identify a vote center close to them, there was not a convenient method of narrowing the list to identify and publicize the list of vote centers in a given city, district, or community. The RR/CC should develop a tool that can be used to narrow the list of vote center locations for a given geography. Further, customizable resources, including one-pagers, that cities, campaigns, and community groups can use should be created to support their organizing and education efforts.

d. We observed that most if not all vote centers only had informational materials for statewide ballot items, not local candidate races and ballot measures. Our poll monitors witnessed a fair number of voters requesting local ballot information, only to be informed by poll workers that information on local ballot races was not readily available at the vote center. In some instances, this led to voters occupying BMDs while they tried to view ballot information over their phones or insisting that poll workers seek out the information for them. The County should offer printed resources on local contests or explore offering an online kiosk where voters can access voting information before checking in to receive their ballots.

A table designated for voter information materials at a vote center.
III. 36 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING LOS ANGELES COUNTY’S VOTING SYSTEM

Next we outline our recommendations for addressing some of the issues we described earlier in this report. California Common Cause has already called for every Los Angeles County voter to receive a ballot by mail after the March election. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has adopted this change, ensuring that every voter will receive a ballot by mail in the November 2020 election. While some of the recommendations listed below need to be prioritized before the November 2020 election, others may need more time and deliberation and should be explored for future election cycles. Many of these recommendations also overlap with the RR/CC’s plan of action outlined in the postelection report referenced earlier.

**ePollbooks and BMDs**

1. Improve ePollbook functionality by addressing syncing issues and improving other ePollbook functions, including the search feature, same-day registration, and the process of spoiling and reissuing ballots.
2. Equip each vote center with a sufficient number of ePollbooks.
3. Consider additional reinforcements to the ballot-on-demand printing process to ensure that ballots are printed correctly.
4. Fix faulty printer gears in BMDs to reduce paper jam issues.
5. Increase voter education efforts to ensure that voters understand that their ballot is a paper ballot, that the BMD does not record voters’ selections, and that voters must cast their ballot at the BMD.
6. Make modifications to the BMD interface to ensure that voters know how to cast their ballot. These modifications could include a pulse or flashing feature, additional colors, and/or sound effects to ensure that voters do not leave the BMD without successfully casting their ballots.
7. Review the BMD arrangement at vote centers to maximize privacy for voters marking their ballots.

**Vote Center Placement, Selection, and Logistics**

8. Ensure that vote centers are selected and distributed strategically throughout the county to expand voting opportunities for all Los Angeles County communities.
9. Increase collaboration among cities, other county departments, and local community organizations to identify and secure spaces that can best serve as vote centers. Invite the community to help secure vote center locations by engaging facility managers and convincing them about the benefits of having a vote center in the community. In many cases, community members might be better fit to initiate these conversations and facility managers may have more of an open ear to them compared to a government department with which they might not be familiar.
10. Ensure that vote centers are equipped to meet the anticipated voter demand in a given community. The number of ePollbooks, BMDs, and staff members should all be proportional to each other and should match the expected voter turnout at that location on Election Day, which remains the most popular day to vote in person.
11. Secure sufficient, free parking at every vote center and provide signage to direct voters to the designated parking area. If parking at a facility is traditionally paid, work with the facility to arrange free parking and post clear signage at the parking lot that indicates parking is free for voters.
12. Fine-tune vote center logistics, including the deployment of resources and election worker schedules, well in advance of vote center opening day to ensure that vote centers open on time.
13. When selecting and coordinating with facilities, clarify expectations regarding vote center policies that need to be in place to ensure a level of standardization in vote centers across the county. This includes free, prearranged parking for voters and reduced security procedures for people who are entering a facility to visit a vote center.

14. Strengthen signage at vote centers, including signage that directs voters to designated parking areas and the area where voting is taking place. Consider the addition of signage inside vote centers that reinforces voters’ right to vote if they are in line by 8 p.m.

15. Explore alternative early vote hours that exceed the eight-hour minimum requirement to accommodate voters who work standard hours and are not able to vote between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

16. Consider the addition of single-day vote centers on Election Day to provide added equity throughout the county. Offering facilities the option to open up as a single-day vote center on Election Day instead of requiring a four-day or 11-day commitment could improve voting accessibility and ensure that vote centers are equitably distributed throughout the county.

**Staffing**

17. Ensure that election workers are confident and fluent with election technology through strengthened hands-on training, cross-training, and tests. Designate additional or backup vote center leads who can step in when leads are not present and support leads in their daily responsibilities.

18. Recruit more technologically-savvy election workers, including high school students, who can navigate ePollbooks and BMDs more easily.

19. Strengthen the line monitor role at every vote center: have election workers focused on directing vote-by-mail voters to the ballot drop box, assisting voters who need same-day registration, and encouraging voters to use the Interactive Sample Ballot to speed up processing times.

20. Emphasize California election law in election worker training. Clarify with election workers that while a driver’s license or ID can be used to check a voter in, it is not required. Reinforce the state law that vote centers must remain open to serve all voters who are in line by 8 p.m.

21. Ensure that bilingual election workers are provided translated nametags that display the languages they speak. Bilingual election workers should also be thoughtfully assigned vote centers to effectively serve the local language needs of the electorate.

**Troubleshooting Systems**

22. Expand hotline capacity to address questions and concerns from election workers, voters, and community groups.

23. Explore creating channels of communication between vote centers to minimize the demand for County assistance, particularly for smaller issues and clarification questions that can be easily addressed by other election workers.

24. Improve technical support capacity to ensure that election technology issues can be addressed quickly.

**Public Education and Engagement**

25. Review the effectiveness of messaging and education strategy in the March 2020 election. Ensure that messaging educates voters on the most important components of VSAP, in addition to the presence of the new BMD. This shift in messaging might incorporate an increased emphasis on the Interactive Sample Ballot and early vote options to improve voter flow and vote center operations.

26. Increase engagement with and expand the membership of the VSAP Advisory Committee, the Language Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the
Community Voter Outreach Committee. Use these advisory bodies to identify vote center locations, recruit election workers, and educate and engage voters. Committees should expand their membership to ensure that more voices are included in the elections planning process. Additional committee members could include more community groups, city clerks, and representatives advocating for student populations and people experiencing homelessness.

27. Develop 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 groups, and local media to redirect voters to other locations if lines form at vote centers.

28. Make the size categorizations of each vote center public so that voters can make an informed decision about which vote center to visit.

29. Work with Google Maps to ensure that vote center locations are not indicated as “closed” on days when the locations are open for voting.

30. Integrate the mobile unit and flex vote center schedule with the Vote Center Locator Tool so that information on all voting locations is centralized in a single place.

31. Develop a tool that can be used to easily identify all vote center locations in a given city, district, or community. Customizable resources, including one-pagers, should be created that cities, campaigns, and community groups can use in their organizing and education efforts to notify voters about vote center locations.

32. Work with city clerks and community groups to post signage at former polling places and vote centers notifying voters that the location has moved. This signage should include a link to the Vote Center Locator Tool as well as the names and addresses of the three to five vote centers closest to that location.

33. Work with vote center facilities to disseminate election information to the facilities’ traditional clientele. For colleges and universities hosting vote centers, work with campus administration to share election information with students, faculty, and staff.

34. Improve accuracy of public communications, including information on the RR/CC website, to ensure that voters receive up-to-date and accurate information.

35. Consider offering information on local races and ballot measures at vote centers or creating an online kiosk where voters can access voting information before checking in.

36. Maintain and strengthen public input models employed in the last cycle, with additional focus given to community needs and gaps in the March 2020 election.
IV. MOVING FORWARD

The issues that unfolded in the last election provided a disappointing first experience with VSAP, particularly for voters who voted on Election Day. While Los Angeles County demonstrated a commitment to serving voters in ways that have never been done before, and took an inclusive and collaborative approach to designing VSAP, the problematic rollout of the program in the March primary undermined many of its selling points. In being ambitious and unveiling a brand-new voting experience almost entirely in a single election, Los Angeles County lost out on the benefits of a gradual rollout.

The implementation of a new election model with new technology comes with some expectation of needing to fine-tune the system as we go. We believe the Los Angeles County RR/CC will get implementation right the same way VSAP was developed: through continued collaboration with Los Angeles County’s many diverse communities and stakeholders and a reaffirmed commitment to getting it right.