

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2021**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 21**

**SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF VOTER'S CHOICE ACT IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY  
BEGINNING IN 2022 (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

San Diego County's current model to conduct elections is a traditional polling place model, in which voters must cast their ballot in person at an assigned polling place unless they have requested their ballot by mail. Additionally, if a voter chooses to go to a polling place other than their assigned poll or if they wish to vote in-person and do not have their mail-in ballot to deliver to a poll worker they will need to vote provisionally. The processing of provisional ballots during the post-election canvass is extremely labor-intensive and depending on the number of provisional ballots it can take two weeks or more to process, delaying the final results of the election. However, there is a favorable alternative in the law that allows counties to move from the traditional polling place model to a one-stop vote center model under the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA).

The VCA vote center model provides voters with more flexible and convenient options for casting their ballot and streamlines election day events for election administrators. Vote centers provide a place for voters to cast a ballot in person and provide voters with additional related services. Under the VCA vote center model, all active registered voters are automatically mailed a ballot which they can return by mail or drop off at any designated drop-off location or vote center. Voters who do not want to vote via mail can take their ballot and vote at any vote center established within the county. Because vote centers nearly eliminate the need to cast a provisional ballot, this reduces the post-election administrative tasks required to certify each election. At vote centers, voters have access to replacement ballots, can use language assistance and translated materials, and are able to register to vote. Vote centers are open for multiple days in advance of election day, giving voters additional time to cast a ballot in person.

In 2019, the Registrar of Voters conducted a feasibility study at the Board's direction to consider moving to a VCA vote center model. At that time, the Registrar concluded that adopting the VCA vote center model was not operationally feasible for the 2020 elections but may be feasible with enough lead time for future elections. Since then, due to legislation and emergency orders necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Registrar conducted the November 3, 2020 presidential general election under a model closer to the VCA vote center model. During that election, over 1.4 million of the 1.6 million county voters chose to cast their mail-in ballot instead of voting at a consolidated polling place. Further, for all future elections, all voters will now be mailed a vote-by-mail ballot regardless of preference, pursuant to Assembly Bill 37 (Berman). Based on data from the past ten years, many of the county's traditional polling places are not being used to capacity as close to eighty percent of voters had signed up to permanently receive their ballots by mail. These changing voter trends are common throughout the State, prompting a number of California counties to move to the VCA vote center model.

Fifteen California counties, representing nearly 50 percent of California voters, including Los Angeles County and Orange County, have already moved to the VCA vote center model. The Secretary of State has confirmed ten additional counties that will transition to VCA in 2022. These include Alameda, Kings, Marin, Merced, San Benito, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Ventura, and Yolo counties. These twenty-five counties that have already transitioned or will transition to the VCA in 2022 represent a total of 13,604,289 registered voters, or nearly 62 percent of California voters, as of August 31, 2021.

Today's action, if approved, authorizes the Registrar of Voters to implement the VCA vote center model in San Diego County beginning with the June 2022 gubernatorial primary election cycle and perform all activities required under the VCA. Additionally, it will authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a competitive solicitation for the purchase and installation of secure mail ballot drop boxes throughout the County, which are necessary to facilitate a transition to the VCA vote center model. With today's voter registration numbers, the County would need to have 132 ballot drop-off sites.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

### **CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER**

1. Authorize the Registrar of Voters to implement the vote center model in San Diego County beginning with the June 2022 gubernatorial primary election cycle and direct the department to perform all activities required under the California Voter's Choice Act.
2. In accordance with Section 401, Article XXIII of the County Administrative Code authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a competitive solicitation for the purchase and installation of secure mail ballot drop boxes, and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price; award contract for a term of one (1) year, with five (5) option years and up to an additional six months if needed, and to amend the contract as needed to reflect changes to services and funding.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

A person's vote can influence policy and who represents them in government, which in turn impacts their environment, health, and quality of life. Having the appropriate resources to conduct a fair, accurate, and transparent election allows all eligible citizens to have a part in matters that affect them.

Other counties that have transitioned to the VCA vote center model have documented increased turnout among all types of voters, but in particular, those voters who participate at lower rates including youth, Latinos, and Asian-American voters (McGhee et al 2019).

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for today's recommendations are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 Operational Plan in the Registrar of Voters. Costs are estimated to be \$22.0 million but are ultimately driven by election requirements such as number of registered voters, number of voting and mail ballot drop off locations, voter outreach and communications and one or two-card ballot. The funding source is unassigned General Fund fund balance, program revenue planned for the June 2022 Gubernatorial Primary Election and savings from conducting the California Gubernatorial Recall Election. Staff will return to the Board if planned funds are not sufficient in Fiscal Year 2021-22. Ongoing costs to implement including General Fund impacts and staff years will be reflected in the FY 2022-23 Operational Plan development.

## **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ACTION:**

ON MOTION of Supervisor Fletcher, seconded by Supervisor Vargas, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

AYES: Vargas, Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Fletcher, Desmond

State of California)  
County of San Diego)

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



**Signed**  
**by** Andrew Potter