



Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

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Testimony to Senate Joint Oversight Hearing of Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments and Assembly Elections and Redistricting

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Good morning Chairman Allen and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here. I am Dean Logan, the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk for Los Angeles County. As the Registrar of Voters for the largest local government in the country, I want to start by saying how excited I am to see that we are finally having this conversation and that the Legislature is taking such an active role and placing such a high priority on voting and elections. This is something that we have been working on for quite some time in our effort to modernize the voting experience in Los Angeles County and we appreciate your leadership.

I know we are all very concerned with the historically low turnout we have seen in California and in particular in Los Angeles County in recent election cycles. And, I know that we are all looking for ways to address the downward trend. We also know that when there are issues and candidates on the ballot that voters care deeply about and when they believe that their vote makes a difference, they tend to show up regardless of place, time and location.

That said, we, as election administrators and legislators, do not have control over the excitement around an issue or the level of interest and the competitiveness of candidates who appear on the ballot. So, let me start by talking about what we do have some control over, and that is removal of the administrative barriers and obstacles that get in the way of voters who want to participate in the election; ensuring that when they are met with those intrinsic values that get them excited about the voting process, we have a structure in place that allows them to participate in a meaningful way.

In an effort to upgrade our voting system in Los Angeles County, we have been looking at not just the equipment but the overall experience of voting. We are designing first for an experience that is relevant, familiar, flexible, and adaptable to voter behavior as opposed to simply adaptable to the current regulatory framework or the very limited commercial vendor and equipment market available.

Much is being talked about with regard to the Colorado model and I am encouraged by the number of people from California who went to Colorado to observe their election and learn about their processes. I think it is an exciting model. There are other models out there and I think it is important that we look at those too. For me, what's most exciting about the Colorado model is that it closely parallels the research and the information we have compiled from our outreach to voters as we have approached our modernization project in Los Angeles County. It is in alignment with the principles and the values associated with a relevant voting experience, an intuitive voting process -- something that is adaptable and flexible, and that, overtime, can be improved as technology advances and as voter behavior changes.

Recognizing there is a lot of momentum and excitement around the Colorado model, I want to comment on some considerations that are important for us to look at as we move forward:

First point is that Colorado did not get to where they are overnight; it was a deliberative process that took time and was informed not just by the election process and administrative procedures but by voter behavior. Colorado's transition occurred over multiple election cycles across a span of years and their first vote center opened in 2003. Moving towards vote centers does not have to take another decade. We can learn from the experiences of Colorado and other states, but the lesson is that there has to be an incremental transition to the model and a deliberative process that recognizes the unique elements in California.

There are a lot of details that need to be looked at to be sure that we get this right. And, it is important to emphasize that we get this right. If we are going to make this type of fundamental change in the voting process in California we can't afford to have missteps that will ultimately further degrade confidence and participation in our elections.

Second point is that California is not Colorado and Los Angeles is not Denver. California has 17.7 million registered voters and 58 counties; Colorado 3.4 million registered voters and 64 counties. To put that in perspective, Los Angeles County has 4.9 million registered voters in the county alone -- one and a half million more voters than the entire state of Colorado which is served by 64 registrars rather than a single registrar of voters. Denver City/County, the largest jurisdiction in the state of Colorado, has 419,000 registered voters. As we look at the possibility of moving to distributing ballots by mail to all voters and setting up a vote center model, we have to recognize the impact of our demographics.

When Colorado moved to vote by mail they were already at 70 percent of their voters voting by mail statewide, only an additional 125,000 voters on a statewide basis were added. Again, to put that in perspective in Los Angeles County where currently 33 to 35 percent of our voters vote by mail, we would need to send out another 3.3 million ballots. If the motor voter bill passes we could very well be mailing 6 million vote by mail ballots. No other jurisdiction in the country has ever done that. In fact, at our 33 percent total right now, Los Angeles County mails and processes more mail ballots than any jurisdiction in the country and there are a limited number of vendors and providers to support that system.

This is not an impossible task. It is a challenge that we have to consider and we have to build the infrastructure and capacity to meet that challenge. Colorado also has a very robust ballot drop off process and some of that is based on their transportation system, their geography and their infrastructure. Those are things that we need to look at closely here. Highway, mass transit, and mobility issues are important issues to be considered. With the model introduced in SB 450 we would be looking at close to one thousand ballot drop off locations in Los Angeles County that would have to be checked and monitored on a regular basis.

Another important consideration is that Colorado has an existing and robust statewide voter registration and elections management system that is designed for the vote center model. While we are encouraged and excited to finally be meeting the threshold in California to implement the VoteCal system, the design of that system did not contemplate the vote center model and did not incorporate the elections management functions that still remain at the local level with the 58 counties. That is a component that will need to be built in and added on to VoteCal if we want to do this and do it right.

Accessibility and services to voters with disabilities are important issues in California as well. We are working very closely with the disabled advocacy community on the equipment that we would deploy at voter centers. We are doing user testing on our proposed ballot marking device with senior citizens and disabled veterans. It is important to make sure that when we do this that we provide accessible locations where all voters have the opportunity to vote an independent ballot with secrecy and dignity.

Finally, the diversity in California -- especially in Los Angeles County -- needs to be taken into account. For example, we provide election materials in 10 different languages compared to two languages in Denver. Questions about how we would accommodate that in terms of mailing out ballots to all voters whether those will need to be bilingual, multilingual or how we would receive requests from voters to ensure that they get the language they need will have to be considered as well. This will be a transformative process for both administrators and voters alike.

We have been having this conversation on modernization and improving the vote experience in Los Angeles County for quite some time. One of the things that has been difficult in our progress is the parallel ambiguity of the regulatory process in building a system that meets the needs of voters but still tries to accommodate outdated processes and requirements. I think this discussion has the potential to significantly decrease the cost of elections but I think it will take a while to get there, and it will take an upfront investment to ensure we are not just -- as we have done in the past -- jerry rigging the old systems to make this new model work, but that we are actually investing in the infrastructure and the process to do this and do it right.

I am optimistic and encouraged about the possibility of change and improvement for California elections and I believe that it will have the end result of helping us increase voter participation. I don't think changing the manner of voting can do it alone, but it can be an important part of the process and I look forward to the continued dialogue. I hope that it continues to be collaborative and that we take into account the various concerns of all jurisdictions from smallest to largest. I think we have the opportunity here to make a real difference for California.

Thank you.