

**Oversight Hearing on Election Administration Funding  
Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments  
Tuesday, March 1, 2016 at 1:30 p.m.  
State Capitol, Room 3191**

**Testimony of Jill LaVine  
Registrar of Voters, Sacramento County**

Good afternoon,

Thank you for holding this Hearing on Election Funding. It is a very timely subject with so many counties needing to update or buy new voting equipment - not just in California but nationally.

I am Jill LaVine, Registrar of Voters for Sacramento County. I have worked in elections since 1987 when I started as temporary worker – cleaning the chads off punch cards before they were counted. I worked my way through the office, learning more about elections with each new assignment. I have been the Registrar for almost 13 years.

Sacramento County has 678,000 voters. Sixty percent of them are Permanent Vote by Mail voters.

A statewide election costs about \$4.5 million. While we can bill the cities and other jurisdictions that we conduct elections for – we are not able to bill the state or federal government for their share. If I could bill the State for the upcoming June election, the cost would be \$1.01M, and the federal government's share would be \$992K. For November the estimate for the state is \$120M, and the federal is \$1.11M

A special election to replace an Assembly Member or Senator is never budgeted, and the county is the one that pays for it. Sacramento County is fortunate that our last special election was in 2010, and involved 12 other counties. The cost for us was \$1,002,658. Then came the domino effect, fill one vacancy and then there is another – the election to fill the seat vacated by the Assembly Member in his quest to become a Senator cost \$556,341. The southern counties have not been so lucky they have many special elections every year. Please consider state funding for special elections.

Sacramento has gone from punch cards, which we had for over 30 years, to fill in the numbered square for one election, to our current optical scan system which we purchased in 2004. Sacramento County never purchased a DRE system.

Our current voting system vendor is ES&S. We use an optical scan system where the voter fills in the bubble next to the name of the candidate of their choice. The ballot for a statewide election is usually two cards, 21 inches long. We purchased this system in 2004 for \$12 million. We used HAVA and Prop. 41 funds, which meant the county only had to pay \$900,000.

We are a precinct-count county which means we have a ballot scanner in every precinct. Voters vote their ballot and then run it through a scanner to be tabulated. The PCMCIA cards are then removed from the scanners and brought back to our office for counting. Our Vote by Mail ballots are counted at our office using the central counters.

For voters with disabilities we have the AutoMark, which can read the ballot to the voter in the required languages, enlarge the print as needed and allows a voter to mark and print out their ballot, but does not tabulate the votes. This machine weighs 90 lbs.

We just completed our required yearly preventative maintenance on our voting equipment. Out of 1,000 scanners, there were 294 needing repairs. Out of 1,000 AutoMarks, 234 needed repairs. I am grateful that we have certified trained staff that can work on these so I was not paying additional labor costs. While some of this equipment only required adjustments, some required new parts, the cost was \$4,280. When I learned that a neighboring county was downsizing and no longer needed all their equipment, I asked if we could have 20 units, so we could have extra parts.

Our current equipment needs to be replaced. It is 12 years old. The technology is from the late 90's. While we have been diligent with the software upgrades and maintenance, you can only patch and pray for so long.

I will also need a new high speed return ballot envelope sorter. We bought ours in 2006, for \$500,000. This new technology saved us 1,528 staff hours the first election we used it. It is much more accurate than labeling tubs and tossing the ballots into the numbered tubs. However, it is 10 years old and with the increase of Vote by Mail voters, I will need a newer, faster, and bigger machine to keep up. This election year we will have double shifts to stay on top of the ballots mailed in.

To get through this year I will have to use our old central counters since the new central count machines that are quicker and faster did not get certified. Unfortunately, I do not have enough machines to keep up with the volume. I am renting an additional machine for \$7,770 from the vendor and for November I will need to rent two central count machines.

My plan is to start the replacement of our voting system after the 2016 elections. We will issue an RFP in early 2017, so we can be ready with the new system for the elections in 2018. I only have two problems - money and certification.

My budget for 2016-17 was due Monday. I put in my budget a request for a new voting system. My budget comes from our County's General Fund account. This is the same account that will pay for the Sheriff, Parks and Health and Human Services. It can be a fight for the money needed – especially when you only hear of Elections twice a year in the even years. The other Departments are much more visible, therefore, more likely to get money.

There has been no savings account set up for new voting equipment, this will be financed through the County's Fixed Asset Acquisition Fund (FAAF).

I am concerned about which type of voting system to buy. Currently I am conducting a polling place election for 40% of my voters and a Vote by Mail election for 60% of the voters. Do I move forward and buy equipment for each of the 550 polling places at an estimated cost of \$8 million? Or, do I move toward the Colorado model, which SB 450 (Allen) has introduced where every voter is mailed a ballot and then drop off boxes and Vote Centers are opened prior to the election. Under the current version of SB 450 that would be 47 Vote Centers for Sacramento County. The cost would be an estimated \$4 million. With 60% (and rising) of my voters voting by mail why do I want to invest in polling places? I will need legislation passed in order to move in that direction and save money.

I will need a certified voting system. I have seen the new “bells and whistles” – such as adjudication of voted ballots on the new equipment. I have seen tablets used for voters with disabilities – not a 90 lb. machine. However, at this time in California my choices are limited. There needs to be changes to the voting equipment certification process. It needs to be faster and easier to make changes and updates to stay current. Testing guidelines need to stay current with changes in technology.

I follow legislation and the current trend to get bills passed is to make it optional for counties. The bill is not mandated which means it is not a fiscal bill and so it gets passed. While many of these new proposals are great, and beneficial to the voter, without the money many counties cannot “opt” in. However, if a neighboring county does not have the funding to move forward, then voters from county to county are not treated the same.

County election officials are asked to do more, and many are great ideas while each new requirement doesn't sound burdensome it does all add up. We are now required to let 16 year olds pre-register but not vote. Tracking these potential voters for 2 years comes at a price. We will also soon have same day voter registration, we have the new requirements of the MOVE Act where a military voter can request their ballot be mailed, e-mailed or faxed. Options are great, but they cost. Sacramento has entered into a contract to make our on-line Sample Ballots accessible. We worked with our Disability Advisory Committee for a year to make sure we met all their requirements. This came at a cost of \$75, 000 to get up and running and an additional \$39,000 for license and support service each year.

Election Officials want to serve our voters in the best way we can, but we need the financial support to do this.