



**NATHAN FLETCHER**  
SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
2019 JUL -1 AM 11:47  
CLERK OF THE BOARD  
OF SUPERVISORS

**AGENDA ITEM**

05

**DATE:** July 9, 2019

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT**

**STUDYING THE VOTE CENTER MODEL: EXPAND VOTING OPPORTUNITIES IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

With seventy percent of San Diego registered voters receiving their ballot permanently by mail, many of the County's nearly 1,600 polling locations are not being used at capacity. In response to these changing voter trends which are common throughout the State, many California counties are (or will be) switching from traditional polling locations to one-stop 'vote centers.' I am proposing that San Diego County explores whether vote centers are the right approach for our region.

The vote center model provides voters with more flexible and convenient options for casting their ballot, and streamlines Election Day events for election administrators. Akin to traditional polling locations, vote centers are a place to cast a ballot in person – but provide voters with additional options. Under a vote center model, all voters are automatically mailed a ballot which they can return by mail, drop off at any designated drop-off location or county vote center, or they can choose to cast a new ballot at the vote center itself. Vote centers nearly eliminate the need to cast a provisional ballot, reducing the post-election administrative tasks required to certify each election. At the 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.

Five California counties implemented vote centers in the 2018 election cycle; on average, voter turnout increased by 4 percent during the 2018 primary, and 3 percent in the 2018 general, as compared with the 2014 election cycle. In the 2020 election cycle, at least 13 California counties will be implementing the vote centers.

To understand whether the vote center model will be successful in San Diego County, a feasibility study and pilot program during the 2020 election cycle should be conducted. A feasibility study could analyze the costs associated with the vote center model, identify

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procedure for selecting vote center locations, and evaluate options for implementation. For the pilot program, several locations and the office of the Registrar of Voters would serve as vote centers for the 2020 primary and general elections. The pilot program could then help inform the feasibility study and identify barriers in State law that may need to be modified.

Today's action directs the Chief Administrative Officer to conduct a vote center model feasibility study, which will include a plan to establish several pilot vote centers for the 2020 election; an assessment of costs and benefits; the development of an implementation strategy; an outreach and education campaign; and identify any State legislative changes that may be needed. The Chief Administrative Officer will report back to the Board within 120 days with the feasibility study.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**SUPERVISOR NATHAN FLETCHER**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to conduct a vote center model feasibility study, which includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  - a. A plan to establish several pilot vote center locations for the 2020 election cycle;
  - b. An assessment of the costs and benefits of the vote center model;
  - c. The development of an implementation strategy associated with a county-wide deployment of the vote center model in the 2022 election cycle and beyond;
  - d. An outreach and education campaign to inform the 2020 election cycle; and
  - e. Identify any State legislative changes that may be needed.
2. Report back to the Board within 120 days with the feasibility study.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

N/A

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

There have been many achievements in the past few years that facilitate improved access to voting, including paid postage on every mail ballot, pre-registration for 16- and 17- year-olds, conditional registration until the close of voting hours on Election Day, expanded languages in which voting material is available, tightened restrictions for removing somebody from the voter rolls, and allowing anybody to turn in a mail ballot if it is signed by the voter.

In San Diego County, as well as across the State, there is an increasing trend toward voting by mail. Currently, 70 percent of the 1.8 million registered voters in San Diego County are permanent mail ballot voters; this number has increased by 600 percent in the past 15 years.

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OPPORTUNITIES IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

Because more voters are permanent mail ballot voters, many of our 1,600 polling locations are underutilized.

As a result, many California counties are (or will be) switching from traditional polling locations to one-stop ‘vote centers.’ I propose that San Diego County assess the vote center model in a feasibility study, which includes establishing several vote centers during the 2020 election cycle to glean lessons learned and address barriers to creating the ideal vote center structure and process.

Vote centers were recently authorized under Senate Bill (SB) 450, California Voter’s Choice Act. The vote center model provides voters with more flexible and convenient options for casting their ballot, and streamlines Election Day events for election administrators. Akin to traditional polling locations, vote centers are a place to cast a ballot in person – but provide voters with additional options. Under a vote center model, all voters are automatically mailed a ballot which they can return by mail, drop off at any designated drop-off location or county vote center, or they can choose to cast a new ballot at the vote center itself. Vote centers nearly eliminate the need to cast a provisional ballot, reducing the post-election administrative tasks required to certify each election. At the vote centers, voters are no longer constrained to visiting an assigned polling place within a 13-hour window when the polls are open. 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.

Five counties (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo) adopted the vote center model for the 2018 election, and on average, voter turnout increased by 4 percent during the 2018 primary, and 3 percent in the 2018 general, as compared with the 2014 election cycle. An additional eight counties (Amador, Butte, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Mariposa, Orange, and Santa Clara) will be adopting the vote center model in 2020, representing half of the state’s voters. Most counties implemented a pilot vote center program in advance of full implementation.

In the November 2018 general election, voter turnout was 66 percent in San Diego County. In the counties that implemented the vote center model, turnout was as high as 73 percent (Napa) or 80 percent (Nevada). While these counties are much smaller than San Diego, the high turnout rates indicate how the vote center model can expand voting opportunities and increase access. This measure aligns with core strategic initiatives of the County, including “creating and promoting diverse opportunities for residents to exercise their right to be civically engaged.”

Furthermore, our County Registrar of Voters will be receiving and implementing procedures for new voting equipment later this year. This equipment can be used both for a pilot vote center program, as well as full implementation in 2022. It is timely that we take advantage of the planning process underway to implement a new voting system and couple the effort with a small-scale pilot program.

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The objective of this action is to expand voting opportunities in San Diego County, and ensure greater participation in the democratic process. I encourage the Board to support this proposal to expand voting opportunities and access.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

The County of San Diego strives to create a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Today's action aligns squarely with the County's mission "to efficiently provide public services that build strong and sustainable communities" as well as the core strategic initiative of "creating and promoting diverse opportunities for residents to exercise their right to be civically engaged." The integrity of the County is enhanced when all citizens are provided the right and opportunity to vote.

Respectfully submitted,



NATHAN FLETCHER  
Supervisor, Fourth District

**ATTACHMENT**  
None

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**REQUIRES FOUR VOTES:**  Yes  No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**  
 Yes  No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**  
N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**  
N/A

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):**  
N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** Board of Supervisors, District 4

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):** N/A

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

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