

Council Meeting of  
January 12, 2010

Honorable Mayor and Members  
of the City Council  
City Hall  
Torrance, California

**Members of the Council:**

**SUBJECT: SUBJECT: Report by the City Council Committee on Citizen Development and Enrichment on the December 21, 2009 meeting regarding election consolidation with the Torrance Unified School District Board of Education, election date and vote by mail election.**

**RECOMMENDATION**

Recommendation of the City Council Committee on Citizen Development and Enrichment that City Council receive the Committee report and provide direction with respect to an action item proposed at the December 21, 2010 meeting of the Committee.

**BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

The City Council Committee on Citizen Development and Enrichment met on December 7, 2009 to discuss issues related to election consolidation with the Torrance Unified School district, a possible vote by mail election, as well as a new election date. City Clerk Sue Herbers shared information regarding the requirements of the Elections Code of the State of California, vote by mail elections, election deadline requirements, costs, as well as the possibility of changing election dates. The City Attorney confirmed that in order to change the City's election date, the City Council must approve a ballot measure to be submitted to Torrance voters.

The report of the Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee was presented to the City Council on December 8, 2009 for discussion and further action. The City Council decided to direct staff to check with TUSD to determine the Board's desirability of consolidated elections and potential changes to election date. It was determined that once the City receives feedback from TUSD, staff will work with the City Attorney, City Clerk and TUSD representatives to ensure compliance with upcoming elections deadlines. Due to the upcoming deadlines for placing a ballot measure on the June 2010 City election, members of the Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee decided to hold a joint meeting with TUSD Board Members to expedite the discussion and return to their respective bodies for a decision regarding any changes to elections.

The City Council Committee on Citizen Development and Enrichment held a joint meeting with TUSD Board Members on December 21, 2009 to discuss issues raised at the December 7, 2009 meeting with emphasis on having a consolidation election with the Torrance Unified School district. City Clerk Sue Herbers shared additional information regarding the requirements of the Elections Code of the State of California, vote by mail elections, election deadline requirements, costs, as well as the possibility of changing election dates. Deputy City Attorney Thompson Bell and Legal Counselor Poblete, from the City Attorney's Office) added that they had been in discussion with TUSD Attorney regarding the possibility of a vote by mail election and that there may be an opportunity for such an election given the City's charter status. The City Attorney's Office will continue to collaborate with the TUSD Attorney on this issue. The committee members decided to delay any immediate action regarding vote by mail to further explore the legal issues and requirements of such an election.

A discussion ensued among the Committee members and the public regarding the benefits of a March and April election. City Clerk Herbers added that the City's election consultant has over 14 elections that they support in April and her recommendation would be a consolidated election between the City and TUSD to be held in March of even years. City Clerk Herbers also shared the benefits of a local consolidated election including increased service level, focus on local issues, same night results, daily absentee ballot updates, increases sense of local participation, and a two week canvass as opposed to waiting for a 28 day canvass. TUSD Board Members were pleased with the local support as opposed to driving to Norwalk to handle election related issues at the Los Angeles County Clerk's Office. The City Clerk also indicated that a March election will impact the current terms of City Council members by decreasing their term by 3 months and it would increase TUSD Board member terms by 5 months. Committee members also discussed the cost savings associated with a consolidated election. Projected savings were based on initial estimates provided by Scott Martin from Martin & Chapman Company. Attachment B provides additional details and a discussion of projected savings.

The discussion also included deadlines related to the upcoming June election. If the City Council and the TUSD Board decide to have a consolidated election and change the election date, the decision must be made immediately to allow preparation of a ballot measure. Committee members directed staff to bring forth an item at the January 12, 2010 City Council meeting and at the January 19, 2010 TUSD Board meeting.

As an action item, the Committee recommended that the City and TUSD change their election date to the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March of even years. The Committee also directed the City Clerk and staff to obtain information from other agencies related to cost sharing options for similar election collaborations between cities and school districts.

Upon receiving Council and TUSD Board direction, staff will work with the City Attorney's Office and the TUSD's Attorney to prepare a ballot measure for the June 2010 Torrance Municipal election to change the election date.

Respectfully submitted,

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CITIZEN  
DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT



Councilman Tom Brewer, Chair



Councilman Gene Barnett



Councilman Pat Furey

- Attachments: A) Agenda of the Committee Meeting – December 21, 2009  
B) Memo from the City Clerk regarding Election Consolidation with TUSD and Vote By Mail for City of Torrance – December 21, 2009

# AGENDA

## JOINT MEETING OF THE TORRANCE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND THE TORRANCE CITY COUNCIL CITIZEN DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, December 21, 2009

TIME: 5:00 p.m.

PLACE: West Annex Commission Room

**COMMITTEE**

**MEMBERS:** Councilman Tom Brewer, Chair                      Mr. Don Lee, T.U.S.D. Board of Education  
Councilman Pat Furey    Mr. Michael Wermers, T.U.S.D. Board of Education  
Councilman Gene Barnett

**STAFF:** Dr. George Mannon, T.U.S.D. Superintendent  
Dr. Donald Stabler, T.U.S.D. Deputy Superintendent

Mary Giordano, Assistant City Manager  
Aram Chaparyan, Assistant to the City Manager  
Sue Herbers, City Clerk

**SUBJECT: ELECTION CONSOLIDATION**

- |      |   |                                     |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|
| I.   | Welcome and Introductions   | Chairman Brewer<br>Board Member Lee |
| II.  | Discussion  | Committee Members                   |
|      | ▶ Election Consolidation with the<br>Torrance Unified School District |                                     |
|      | ▶ Potential for Mail Ballot Elections                                 |                                     |
|      | ▶ Change of Election Date   |                                     |
| III. | Public Comment  |                                     |
| VII. | Adjournment   |                                     |



**Office of the City Clerk  
City of Torrance**

DATE: December 21, 2009

TO: Members of the Torrance Citizen Development and Enrichment Committee  
Member of the Torrance Unified School District Committee

FROM: Sue Herbers, Torrance City Clerk

RE: Election Consolidation, Election Dates and All Mail Ballots

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I am pleased to provide information on various aspects of the election process related to possible consolidation and election date changes for your review.

It is always important to keep in mind two things when discussing any election

- that each one is different despite any similarity of the date/time and
- that the cost of democracy is not inexpensive.

Savings may be found but costs for elections will continue to a part of the budget regardless of when or how. The ability for the voter to express his or her wishes is always a first priority.

Costs can be impacted by:

- California codes (Elections, Government, Education) as well as the Help America Vote Act govern the manner in which elections are conducted.
- Printing and translation costs increase with higher numbers. If information does not fit on a single ballot card there are increased printing costs for the second ballot as well as increased costs for mailing a larger sample ballot pamphlet.
- Some elections may be cancelled due to the number of candidates filing for office.

The Torrance School Board was created within the City of Torrance Charter. Consolidation of City of Torrance and Torrance Unified School District seems to be possible within the Election and Education Codes.

The methods of conducting the election depend on the choice of a consolidated election date. It is still unclear at this time if a school board election could be held as an all mail ballot but being a charter city may allow greater flexibility.

## ELECTION DATES

In order to change the election date for the City of Torrance voter approval is required by way of an initiative placed on the ballot.

Currently the City holds its elections on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in even years and is consolidated on the Los Angeles County ballot.

- This election is a statewide primary date which precludes holding a stand alone or VBM election.
- Previous municipal elections were first held in April then moved to March of even years. Changes were made due to the nature of the changing California presidential primary elections which has been moved numerous times since 1996.

Torrance Unified School District conducts its elections in the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of odd year on an election ballot conducted by the County Registrar.

The California Elections Code Section 10403.5(b) states that

*As a result of the adoption of an ordinance pursuant to this section, no term of office shall be increased or decreased by more than 12 months. As used in this subdivision, "12 months" means the period between the day upon which the term of office would otherwise have commenced and the first Tuesday after the second Monday in the 12th month before or after that day, inclusive.*

Dates for elections are noted however any date can be chosen.

Election Date	Increase in term	Decrease in term	Stand Alone	County	VBM
June even	COT --		NO	YES	NO
June even	TUSD + 7 mo		NO	YES	NO
Nov odd		COT - 7 mo	YES	YES	YES
Nov odd	TUSD --		YES	YES	YES ??
Mar even		COT - 4 mo	YES	YES \$\$	YES
Mar even	TUSD + 5 mo		YES	YES \$\$	YES ??
Apr even		COT - 3 mo	YES	YES \$\$	YES
Apr even	TUSD +6 mo		YES	YES \$\$	YES ??
Nov even	COT +5 mo		NO	YES	NO
Nov even	TUSD +12 mo		NO	YES	NO

Examples of various elections calendars (Attachment A).  
Some City of Torrance election history is also attached (B).

Stand alone or polling place elections are conducted by the City Clerk as the elections official.  
Some of the benefits include:

- Increased service levels;
- Focus on local issues;
- All Vote by Mail ballots are returned locally with a daily absentee count available at the City Clerk's office;
- Same night results;
- Increased sense of local participation;
- 2 week canvass as opposed to waiting for a 28 day canvass

A concern may be that El Camino would be left in a smaller pool and their rates may increase.

## **ELECTION COSTS**

Estimates for elections are just that. All elections depend on the number of positions, number of candidates, and/or measure along with the actual number of registered voters.

Election costs for cities placed on the County ballot are shared by the number of agencies on the ballot. No exact details on how the sharing is allocated have been provided but the estimate shows three (3) agencies sharing. Estimates are available six to nine months out from an election.

- The cost of the 2008 election (3 Council candidates and 1 measure) was \$174,096.
- The most current estimate for the June 2010 General Municipal election from the County is \$235,000 (with 2 measures) to \$260,000 (with three measures) depending on its size. The estimate is based on 81,000 voters however the current number of registered voters is only 75,000. (Attachment C)

The estimated costs for stand alone elections from Martin & Chapman (full memo from Scott Martin – Attachment D) give the costs based on 74,500 registered voters and notes estimates for both City only and City & School for both stand alone (polling places) and all mail ballots. Also attached is a 2008 estimate to give a comparison. It shows the increase in postage and printing costs in the two year period.

## **POTENTIAL FOR VOTE BY MAIL ELECTION**

The City does not need to place that specific question on the ballot but may propose and adopt an ordinance allowing for an all mail ballot.

### ***Torrance Charter Section 500. Procedure for Holding Elections.***

*All elections shall be held in the manner prescribed in the Elections Code of the State of California for the holding of elections in general law cities, so far as the same may be applicable and excepting as herein otherwise provided. No person shall be entitled to vote in any such election unless he shall be a qualified elector of said City or school district. The City Council may by ordinance provide a procedure for the holding of City elections, in which event such procedure shall prevail over the provisions of the said Elections Code.*

Some California cities are placing measures on the ballot to adopt charters in order to use a Vote By Mail option as their counties are increasing the estimates for elections to higher and higher numbers.

Vote By Mail elections cannot be held on a statewide election date - June and November of each even-numbered year and held the first Tuesday in February of each year evenly divisible by the number four.

Costs for Vote By Mail (VBM) elections are based on the number of registered voters requiring full ballots to be printed and mailed, size of ballots – number of candidates, translations, postage and printing costs and the larger the numbers the higher the costs.

The City of Los Angeles City Clerk has recently completed a study that showed it was not cost effective for the entire city but all mail ballots would work well for the smaller runoff or district elections.

Burbank has conducted over seven VBM election successful and has turnouts that have exceeded past regular municipal election turnouts. Santa Barbara recently conducted a VBM ballot that saw turnout go from 22% to 40%

I have provided *Getting It Straight for 2008: What We Know About Vote By Mail Elections and How To Conduct Them Well* by Common Cause.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

### Consolidation

If consolidation of the two agencies is desired, decisions made on the date may impact whether the agencies choose to have the election conducted by the county or the Torrance City Clerk.

If the City Clerk is chosen to conduct either a stand alone (polling place) election or vote by mail the method of sharing the costs out would need to be addressed. An equitable method must be chosen especially in the event that the consolidation is in place and one of the agency elections has no more candidates than seats to be filled which would cause the election to be canceled. It is a rare occurrence that has happened only once in the City. If that occurred the City Clerk would be required to conduct the election in full for the agency that does have candidates which requires staff time and the full amount of estimated costs.

### Voter preferences

The number of Permanent Absent Voters (PAVs) has increased significantly in recent elections. Currently the Registrar has indicated that Torrance has 12,168 permanent absent voters. Election officials have stated that numbers of voters using the mail option are anticipated to increase to 50% to 60% statewide in the near future.

### Voter Turnout

Historically there is a larger voter turnout for statewide elections due to the issues on the statewide elections.

However, the local elections are placed at the very bottom of the ballot. This placement may invite "voter fatigue" depending on the size of the ballot. Voters may not be as informed on local issues due to the emphasis placed on the gubernatorial or presidential, constitutional offices and/or measures that are on any ballot. Candidates may be forced to raise and spend additional funds to be heard by the local voter.

### Elections by District

The matter is raised occasionally but neither the City nor TUSD have elections by district and there has been no history of the matter going to the voters in the past.

### Timing of election for Charter change

This item may be placed on a later ballot (November 2010) however the cost to the city would probably be higher than adding to the current election. An estimate has not yet been requested.

If a question needs to be placed on the June ballot, action needs to be taken in a reasonable amount of time to allow the arguments and rebuttals to be written. February 16, 2009 is the **suggested** last day to call an election for a measure.

**Municipal Elections**  
**General Municipal Election**  
**April 13, 2010**  
*Laws in effect in 2010*  
*(Calendar laws updated 10/2009)*

Date(s)	E minus	to E minus	Action
October 23	-172		Suggested Last Day to File Petitions Regarding Measure
December 7	-127		Suggested Last Day for Council to Adopt Resolutions
December 7 to December 21	-127	-113	Election Official to Publish Notice of Election - Candidates
December 14	-120		Last Day to Adopt Regulations for Candidates Statements
December 21 to January 15	-113	-88	Filing Period for Nomination Papers and Candidate's Statements
or January 19		-84	<i>(if city is closed on Friday and Monday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day)</i>
December 22	-112		Suggested Last Day to Call Election For Ballot Measures
December 23	-111		Suggested Last Day to Post Notice of Deadline for Filing Arguments
January 5	-98		Suggested Last Day to File Arguments / Must Be 14 days after Council calls Election
January 15	-88		Suggested Last Day to File Rebuttal Arguments / 10 Days after Arguments
January 15	-88		Last Day to Call Election For Ballot Measures
January 15 or January 19	-88	-84	Last Day to File Nomination Papers
January 20	-83		Last Day to File Nomination Papers – Extended Filing Period
January 20	-83		Last Day to Withdraw Measure(s) from Ballot
January 21	-82		Secretary of State to Determine Order of Names on Ballot
January 28	-75		Time to Cancel Election – Insufficient Candidates
January 31			Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - Semi-Annual Statement
February 11	-61		Last Day to Submit Precinct Consolidations to County
February 11	-61		Suggested Last Day to Designate Polling Places
February 11	-61		Suggested Last Day To Request Postage Check for Mailing of Sample Ballot Pamphlets
February 15 to March 30	-57	-14	Filing Period for Write-in Candidate
March 4	-40		Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - 1st Pre-election Statement
March 4 to March 15	-40	-29	Suggested Time to Alert Your Local Post Office of Upcoming Mailings
March 15	-29		Last Day to Designate Polling Places & Appoint Precinct Board Members
March 15	-29		First Day to Mail out Permanent Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
March 15 to April 6	-29	-7	Voters May Request Vote-by-Mail Ballots with Regular Applications
March 23	-21		Last Day to Mail Sample Ballots and Polling Place Notices
March 29	-15		Last Day to Register to Vote
March 30	-14		Last Day to File for Write-in Candidate
March 30	-14		Last Day to Prepare List of Precincts with Multi-lingual Precinct Board Members
April 1	-12		Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - 2nd Pre-election Statement
April 1	-12		Post Notice – Vote-by-Mail Canvass
April 2	-11		First Day to Process Returned/Voted Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
April 3	-10		Publish Notice of Central Counting Place
April 6	-7		Last Day for Election Official to Publish Notice of Nominees
April 6	-7		Last Day to Publish Notice of Polling Places
April 6	-7		Last Day to Post Notice of Polling Places & Precinct Board Members
April 7 to April 13	-6		Emergency/Late Vote-by-Mail Voting Period
April 9	-4		Suggested Last Day to Post Notice of Manual Tally
April 12	-1		Last Day for Council to Adopt Procedures to Resolve Tie Vote
<b>April 13</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>ELECTION DAY</b>
April 13	0		Last Day to Receive Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
April 13	0		Election Official to Canvass Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
No Later Than May 7	24		Election Official to Canvass the Returns
No Later Than May 7	24		Declaration of the Results
April 19 to May 7			Reorganize Council and Choose Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem
			<i>(At same meeting as Declaration of Results and Installation)</i>
No Later Than May 11	28		Last Day to Post Notice of Precinct Board Members
May 19 to June 6			<i>(30 days after Assuming Office)</i> Last Day to File Statement of Economic Interests
July 31			Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - Semi-Annual Statement
April 1, 2011			Last Day to Submit Report on Measures to Secretary of State

**Municipal Elections**  
**General Municipal Election**  
**March 8, 2011**  
*Laws in effect in 2010*  
*(Calendar laws updated 10/2009)*

Date(s)	E minus	to E minus	Action
September 17	-172		Suggested Last Day to File Petitions Regarding Measure
November 1	-127		Suggested Last Day for Council to Adopt Resolutions
November 1 to November 15	-127	-113	Election Official to Publish Notice of Election - Candidates
November 8	-120		Last Day to Adopt Regulations for Candidates Statements
November 15 to December 10 or December 13	-113	-88 -85	Filing Period for Nomination Papers and Candidate's Statements <i>(if city is closed on Friday and Monday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day)</i>
November 16	-112		Suggested Last Day to Call Election For Ballot Measures
November 17	-111		Suggested Last Day to Post Notice of Deadline for Filing Arguments
November 30	-98		Suggested Last Day to File Arguments / Must Be 14 days after Council calls Election
December 10	-88		Suggested Last Day to File Rebuttal Arguments / 10 Days after Arguments
December 10	-88		Last Day to Call Election For Ballot Measures
December 10 or December 13	-88	-85	Last Day to File Nomination Papers
December 15	-83		Last Day to File Nomination Papers – Extended Filing Period
December 15	-83		Last Day to Withdraw Measure(s) from Ballot
December 16	-82		Secretary of State to Determine Order of Names on Ballot
December 23	-75		Time to Cancel Election – Insufficient Candidates
January 6	-61		Last Day to Submit Precinct Consolidations to County
January 6	-61		Suggested Last Day to Designate Polling Places
January 6	-61		Suggested Last Day To Request Postage Check for Mailing of Sample Ballot Pamphlets
January 10 to February 22	-57	-14	Filing Period for Write-in Candidate
January 27	-40		Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - 1st Pre-election Statement
January 27 to February 7	-40	-29	Suggested Time to Alert Your Local Post Office of Upcoming Mailings
January 31			Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - Semi-Annual Statement
February 7	-29		Last Day to Designate Polling Places & Appoint Precinct Board Members
February 7	-29		First Day to Mail out Permanent Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
February 7 to March 1	-29	-7	Voters May Request Vote-by-Mail Ballots with Regular Applications
February 15	-21		Last Day to Mail Sample Ballots and Polling Place Notices
February 21	-15		Last Day to Register to Vote
February 22	-14		Last Day to File for Write-in Candidate
February 22	-14		Last Day to Prepare List of Precincts with Multi-lingual Precinct Board Members
February 24	-12		Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - 2nd Pre-election Statement
February 24	-12		Post Notice – Vote-by-Mail Canvass
February 25	-11		First Day to Process Returned/Voted Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
February 26	-10		Publish Notice of Central Counting Place
March 1	-7		Last Day for Election Official to Publish Notice of Nominees
March 1	-7		Last Day to Publish Notice of Polling Places
March 1	-7		Last Day to Post Notice of Polling Places & Precinct Board Members
March 2 to March 8	-6		Emergency/Late Vote-by-Mail Voting Period
March 4	-4		Suggested Last Day to Post Notice of Manual Tally
March 7	-1		Last Day for Council to Adopt Procedures to Resolve Tie Vote
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March 14 to April 1			<i>(At same meeting as Declaration of Results and Installation)</i> Reorganize Council and Choose Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem
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April 1			Last Day to Submit Report on Measures to Secretary of State
April 13 to May 1		<i>(30 days after Assuming Office)</i>	Last Day to File Statement of Economic Interests
July 31			Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - Semi-Annual Statement

## Municipal Elections

### June 7, 2011

Laws in effect in 2010

(Calendar laws updated 10/2009)

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February 14 to March 11 or March 14	-113	-88	Filing Period for Nomination Papers and Candidate's Statements
		-85	<i>(if city is closed on Friday)</i>
February 15	-112		Suggested Last Day to Call Election For Ballot Measures
February 16	-111		Suggested Last Day to Post Notice of Deadline for Filing Arguments
March 1	-98		Suggested Last Day to File Arguments / Must Be 14 days after Council calls Election
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April 28 to May 9	-40	-29	Suggested Time to Alert Your Local Post Office of Upcoming Mailings
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**Municipal Elections**  
**General Municipal Election**  
**November 8, 2011**  
*Laws in effect in 2010*  
*(Calendar laws updated 10/2009)*

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October 24	-15		Last Day to Register to Vote
October 25	-14		Last Day to File for Write-in Candidate
October 25	-14		Last Day to Prepare List of Precincts with Multi-lingual Precinct Board Members
October 27	-12		Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - 2nd Pre-election Statement
October 27	-12		Post Notice -- Vote-by-Mail Canvass
October 28	-11		First Day to Process Returned/Voted Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
October 29	-10		Publish Notice of Central Counting Place
November 1	-7		Last Day for Election Official to Publish Notice of Nominees
November 1	-7		Last Day to Publish Notice of Polling Places
November 1	-7		Last Day to Post Notice of Polling Places & Precinct Board Members
November 2 to November 8	-6		Emergency/Late Vote-by-Mail Voting Period
November 4	-4		Suggested Last Day to Post Notice of Manual Tally
November 7	-1		Last Day for Council to Adopt Procedures to Resolve Tie Vote
<b>November 8</b>	0		<b>ELECTION DAY</b>
November 8	0		Last Day to Receive Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
November 8	0		Election Official to Canvass Vote-by-Mail Voter Ballots
No Later Than December 2	24		Election Official to Canvass the Returns
No Later Than December 2	24		Declaration of the Results
November 14 to December 2			Reorganize Council and Choose Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem <i>(At same meeting as Declaration of Results and Installation)</i>
No Later Than December 6	28		Last Day to Post Notice of Precinct Board Members
December 14 to January 1			Last Day to File Statement of Economic Interests <i>(30 days after Assuming Office)</i>
January 31			Last Day to File Campaign Expenditure Statements - Semi-Annual Statement

## ELECTION HISTORY - ELECTION DATE CHANGES

Year	Date	Type	Registered	Total Voting	% Turnout	Regular ballots	Absentee Ballots	% Absentee
<b>2004</b> <small>General Presidential</small>	<b>Nov. 2</b> RES. 2004-155 ADPT. DEC 07	<b>Special</b> (CONSOLIDATED)	72,320	61,373	85%	45,671	15,702	34%
<b>Measure</b>		<b>Passed</b>			<b>Defeated</b>			
<b>MEASURE T</b> AMEND SECTION 510 OF THE CHARTER TO CHANGE THE DATE OF HOLDING THE GENERAL MUNICIPAL ELECTION TO THE SAME DAY AS THE STATEWIDE DIRECT PRIMARY ELECTION IN EACH EVEN-NUMBERED YEAR		Yes	35,830					
		No	17,589					

Year	Date	Type	Registered	Total Voting	% Turnout	Regular ballots	Absentee Ballots	% Absentee
<b>1999</b>	<b>November 2</b> RES. 99-131 ADPT. DEC 7	<b>Special</b> (CONSOLIDATED)	75,263	8,468	11%	5,742	2,726	32%
<b>Measure</b>		<b>Passed</b>			<b>Defeated</b>			
<b>MEASURE H:</b> CHANGE CITY ELECTION DATE FROM MARCH TO MAY OF EVEN NUMBERED YEARS					No			4,234
					Yes			3,755

Year	Date	Type	Registered	Total Voting	% Turnout	Regular ballots	Absentee Ballots	% Absentee
<b>1974</b>	<b>November 5</b> RES. 74-258 ADPT. DEC. 10	<b>General Municipal</b>	72,654	45,025	62%	44,040	985	2.2%
<b>Measure</b>		<b>Passed</b>			<b>Defeated</b>			
<b>PROPOSITION VV</b> CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. 1 ELECTIVE OFFICE VACANCIES		Yes	26,056					
		No	9,466					
<b>PROPOSITION WW</b> CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. 2 GENERAL MUNICIPAL ELECTION IN MARCH OF EACH EVEN YEAR		Yes	24,660					
		No	10,347					
<b>PROPOSITION XX</b> CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. 3 COUNCIL COMPENSATION; CLERK AND TREASURER DUTIES AND COMPENSATION					No			27,603
					Yes			7,979
<b>PROPOSITION YY</b> CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. 4 POWERS & DUTIES OF CITY MANAGER; COUNCIL ACTION ON BUDGET; DEMANDS & AUDITS		Yes	19,505					
		No	15,440					

NOTE: The State Legislature may amend the Elections Code at any time to change the election day(s).  
 In 1995 the 1996 California Primary was moved to the 3rd Tuesday in March;  
 In 1999 the 2000 California Primary was moved to the 1st Tuesday in March.  
 Currently the statewide primary election is the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in June of even years.  
 Pending legislation will move the 2008 California Presidential Primary to February 5, 2008.



# CITY OF TORRANCE ELECTION HISTORY

Prepared by the Office of the City Clerk

INFORMATION IS PROVIDED IN REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Year	Date	Type	Registered	Total Voting	% Turnout	Regular ballots	Absentee Ballots	% Absentee
<b>2008</b> <small>Presidential Primary</small>	<b>June 6</b> RES. 2008-88 ADPT. JUL 1	<b>Regular</b> (CONSOLIDATED)	73,722	21,072	25.5%	13,187	7,905	59.9%
<b>Councilmember</b>		<b>Elected</b>			<b>Candidates Not Elected</b>			
		Susan Rhilinger	9,413	Gavin "Hachiya" Wasserman	6,496			
		Gene Barnett	8,234	Tim Goodrich	6,091			
		Pat Furey	7,300	Kurt Weideman	5,863			
		Cliff Numark	7,218	Rod Guyton	5,554			
				Mike Mauno	3,686			
				David Ouwerkerk	2,313			
				Donald "Don" Pyles	1,845			
				Charles M. Deemer	1,504			
				Ricky Bhavnani	798			
				S. "Sam" Bhavnani	570			
<b>Measure</b>		<b>Passed</b>			<b>Defeated</b>			
MEASURE T SHALL AN ORDINANCE BE ADOPTED TO RATIFY AND UPDATE TORRANCE'S EXISTING TELEPHONE UTILITY USERS' TAX, TO CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN SUCH ESSENTIAL CITY SERVICES AS POLICE, FIRE, STREET REPAIR, PARKS, LIBRARIES, RECREATION PROGRAMS AND OTHER SERVICES THAT ARE PRESENTLY PAID FOR FROM THE CITY'S GENERAL FUND; PROVIDED THAT THE PRESENT TAX RATE WILL NOT CHANGE. LOW-INCOME SENIORS AND DISABLED PERSONS WILL REMAIN EXEMPT, AND INDEPENDENT ANNUAL AUDITS WILL BE REQUIRED?		Yes	10,716					
		No	8,346					

Year	Date		
<b>2007</b>	<b>June 26</b>		
<b>Councilmember</b>		<b>Appointed</b>	<b>Candidates Not Appointed</b>
RESIGNATION OF PAT MCINTYRE ... JUNE 2, 2007  APPOINTED TO FILL VACANCY 6/26/2007		Gene Barnett	Julia Abreu-Mason Salem "Sam" Charry Charles Michel Deemer Peter A. Donnellan Christopher Graue Regina Horton Charles Leone G. Rick Marshall Mike Mauno Cliff Numark David Ouwerkerk Susan Rhilinger Richard Tsao Kurt Weideman

Year	Date		
<b>2006</b>	<b>Aug. 8</b>		
<b>Councilmember</b>		<b>Appointed</b>	<b>Candidates Not Appointed</b>
FRANK SCOTTO ELECTED MAYOR JUNE 6, 2006, INSTALLED 7/11/06 VACATING COUNCIL SEAT  GENE DREVNO APPOINTED TO FILL VACANCY 8/08/2006		Gene Drevno	Richard T. Browning (w) George Ciampa William Cook Robert R. Cupery Charles Michel Deemer Linda England Michael Griffiths Rod Guyton VJ Hirsch Harvey Horwich (w) Benito Miranda Cliff Numark Susan Rhilinger Craig Thorsen Richard Wagner Kurt Weideman Christopher Zeller



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
**REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK**

12400 Imperial Highway – P.O. Box 1024, Norwalk, California 90651-1024 – www.lavote.net

2009 DEC 21 AM 9:28

RECEIVED

**DEAN C. LOGAN**  
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

December 17, 2009

Sue Herbers, City Clerk  
City of Torrance  
3031 Torrance Blvd.  
Torrance, CA 90503

**ESTIMATED COSTS FOR JUNE 8, 2010 PRIMARY ELECTION**

Dear Ms. Herbers:

The estimated costs for the City of Torrance to consolidate with June 8, 2010 Primary Election, with two measures and four offices is \$235,000.

This estimate is based on the following factors which are known at this time: 81,121 registered voters, 12,168 permanent absent voters, 85 precincts, 6 pages per measure, 1 page per office, and 3 jurisdictions sharing prorated costs with your agency. **A change in any of these factors will have an impact on final costs.**

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (562) 462-2690.

Sincerely,

DEAN C. LOGAN  
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

Emmanuel Anyiwo, Head  
Financial Services Section



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
**REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK**

12400 Imperial Highway – P.O. Box 1024, Norwalk, California 90651-1024 – www.lavote.net

RECEIVED

2009 DEC 21 AM 9:28

CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT  
 COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES



**DEAN C. LOGAN**  
 Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

December 17, 2009

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 City of Torrance  
 3031 Torrance Blvd.  
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If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (562) 462-2690.

Sincerely,

DEAN C. LOGAN  
 Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

*Emmanuel Anyiwo*

Emmanuel Anyiwo, Head  
 Financial Services Section

Friday, December 4, 2009

We have put together a comparison for you as best we can, as there are so many variables that can happen - see the attached.

We did 4 complete costs comparisons, based on mayor, 3 council, clerk, treasurer, both with and without the 3 school board. In the years in which there is no mayor or clerk or treasurer, the costs only go down by the costs of the candidates statements and translations, which I think you bill to the candidates anyways. All other costs remain. The addition of the school board only increases the costs by the number of candidates and candidates statements.

In all cases, the addition of a measure adds either \$10,000 (if it stays on the same single card) or \$28,000 if it causes the ballot to go to a 2nd ballot card for each voter.

The ROV costs shown are only what I know and have been told by other cities. You need to get more precise quotes from them for their services. For a polling location election, they initiate their files, assist you with consolidating county precincts into less city voting precincts, loan equipment, send us the voter file, and will check signatures for you. For an all mail ballot, they only initiate an election and send us a voter file, so their costs are less. You will have to sign up for VIMS Late, which allows you to log on to their system and check signatures from your office. Cost is minimal.

Besides the costs shown on the attached spreadsheet, you should include:

-Notices and publications

-Staff time for:

1. For poll place election, finding poll locations and poll workers, and verifying signatures on vbm ballots
2. For all mail ballot, verifying signatures on vbm ballots

-Possible purchase or rental of 5-7 PCs to track incoming ballots and verify signatures

WE just completed an all mail ballot election, with 2 cards per voter, in Santa Barbara November 3. And Burbank had 2 all mail ballot elections earlier this year. You might want to give Cyndi Rodriguez, City Clerk in Santa Barbara, or Margarita Campos, City Clerk in Burbank, a call for some guidelines and recommendations.

As far as dates, being a charter city you can pick any date. Just please-please-please do not consider the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March of the odd year - that is when we have 50+ other cities and would not be able to give you the attention you would need. The 2nd Tuesday of April of odd is OK, and February and March of even years are OK, as is December odd as you mention.

These estimates are not based on the hide-a-signature envelopes, as those type of envelopes may not be able to be used for an all mail ballot due to the size of the outgoing envelopes that contain a full size voter information pamphlet along with the ballots. This is something we would have to check on. They can be used for poll location elections and would add about an additional \$20,000-\$30,000 to the cost of the election. In my opinion, you don't need to go there until the county does.

Thanks,

Scott Martin  
Martin & Chapman Co.  
714-939-9866

**TORRANCE COMPARISON WORKSHEET**

Compiled 12-4-2009

Parameters Used:  
 Registered Voters (Active): 74500  
 Polling Places: 40  
 City Only Election: 12 Candidates  
 City & School Election: 20 Candidates  
 All Mail Ballots assumes a 35% return

	POLLING PLACES		ALL MAIL BALLOT		Optional
	City Only	City & School	City Only	City & School	
<b>ESTIMATED COSTS</b>					
Marin & Chapman Co invoice	\$141,500.00	\$154,000.00	\$137,500.00	\$149,000.00	
Postage-Sample Ballots	\$18,663.00	\$18,663.00	\$18,663.00	\$18,663.00	
Postage-PVBM Ballots-sent by M&C	\$5,720.00	\$5,720.00			
Postage-VBM Ballots-sent out by Clerk	\$3,080.00	\$3,080.00			
Postage-Business Reply for Return Ballots					\$13,850.00
Poll Worker Salaries	\$19,600.00	\$19,600.00			
Polling Place Rental Fees	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$100.00	\$100.00	
ROV-Election Initiation Fee	\$800.00	\$800.00	\$800.00	\$800.00	
ROV- Precinct Consolidations	\$2,330.00	\$2,330.00			
ROV-Precinct Supply Processing	\$2,704.00	\$2,704.00			
Bar Code Scanner for Signature verification	\$350.00	\$350.00	\$700.00	\$700.00	
	<u>\$195,747.00</u>	<u>\$208,247.00</u>	<u>\$157,763.00</u>	<u>\$169,263.00</u>	
ROV-Signature Verification if County does	\$4,550.00	\$4,550.00	not available	not available	

**To the any of the above, the addition of a measure(s) costs:**

6 additional pages per measure in Sample Ballot for Text, Analysis, Arguments, Rebuttals  
 Translations - Spanish \$8,000.00  
 Ballots - if fits on same card \$1,600.00  
 \$300.00

**Stays on 1 card \$9,900.00**  
 Ballots - if causes to go to a 2nd card for each voter \$18,500.00

**Creates a 2nd card \$28,400.00** includes the \$9,900 above

**Herbers, Sue**

**From:** Scott Martin [scott@martinchapman.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, May 19, 2008 12:53 PM  
**To:** Herbers, Sue  
**Subject:** RE: RUN OFF ELECTION ESTIMATE - BALLPARK ok  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Red

**PREVIOUS  
QUOTE**

Hi Sue

Here are the estimates . . .

**MAY 2008 MARTIN AND CHAPMAN ESTIMATE**

Polling Place or Mail Ballot Election based on 73,073 Registered Voters (April 4, 2008)

**NOTE:** Estimate requested in the event that a tie vote occurs.

These are based on the following:

- 13,000 vote-by-mail ballots if polling place election
- 35 polling places (or 3 drop off sites for mail ballot election)
- 4 candidates (costs include candidates statements)
- Sample Ballots in English Chinese Korean and Spanish (for DOJ compliance) – candidate costs are included in the overall costs
  - if polling place election, Sample Ballots in 4 languages, approximately 18 pages – assuming 4 or less candidates
  - if all mail ballot, 1 11 x 17 Voter Pamphlet in English and Spanish for all voters, 1 11 x 17 for voters in Chinese and Korean to those indicated on the county file – assuming 4 or less candidates
- For polling place election - we will address, insert and mail out your approximately 10,000 Permanent Vote-By Mail voter (PVM) ballots for you, you will only have to handle the daily VBM's that come in
- For all mail ballot election, we do all the inserting and mailing
- The county will provide you with the VIMS signature retrieval system for you to check your own signatures at city hall

<b>Costs</b>	<b>Polling Places</b>	<b>Mail Ballot</b>
Martin & Chapman's costs	\$124,024.00	\$91,082.00
Postage - Outgoing SB	\$16,131.00	\$16,131.00
Postage - Outgoing AV's	\$4,090.00	included above
Postage - Returned AV's (40%)	\$0.00	\$13,198.00 (if city pays for it)
Poll Workers & Polling Places	\$12,775.00	\$0.00
Estimated County charges	\$3,500.00	\$1000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$160,520.00</b>	<b>\$121,411.00</b>

Once the council has determined what date the election will be, I will generate a Calendar of Events, and once it is determined if you will do polling places or all mail ballot, I will forward to you a formal estimate.

Let me know if you have any questions.



# Getting It Straight for 2008

## What We Know About Vote By Mail Elections and How to Conduct them Well



# Getting It Straight for 2008

*What We Know about Mail Elections and how to Conduct Them Well*

## Executive Summary

Vote By Mail (VBM) elections can increase turnout by four to five percentage points in general elections and significantly more in local or off-year elections. Rather than sparking participation among citizens who never vote, it appears that the added convenience of voting by mail serves primarily to retain higher participation among those voters who tend to vote in general elections by making it easier for them to vote in traditionally lower-interest local, special, or nonpartisan elections.

Among the other benefits of mail balloting are a reduction in logistical problems associated with in-person voting on Election Day, a reduction in poll-worker requirements, increased opportunities to conduct voter mobilization, minimizing the appeal of last-minute attack ads, providing more time for voters to fill out their ballots, the potential to save both time and money, and deterring fraud more efficiently than photo-ID requirements used with in-person polling.

There are also some potential problems with voting by mail, but these can be mitigated or eliminated by using the following recommended practices for Vote By Mail elections.

## **Recommended Vote by Mail Practices**

- 1) Election officials should provide candidates, parties, and interest groups with free lists of registered voters and update them at least twice a week as ballots are returned so that candidates, parties and voters can see whose votes have been received.
- 2) Voters who do not wish to vote by mail should be able to cast ballots in private booths at vote centers staffed with trained election workers in the days leading up to and on Election Day.
- 3) Vote by mail programs should adopt the practice of requiring voters to sign ballot envelopes and comparing those signatures to the signatures on the voters' registration files. Election workers must also use statewide databases to ensure that only one ballot is cast per voter.
- 4) VBM should not be viewed as a solution to the deeper problem of complete non-participation by much of the eligible electorate. Other measures must be taken to address the lack of civic involvement that reduces the quality of our collective decision-making.
- 5) In states that currently have permanent absentee voter programs, moving to elections where every registered voter is mailed a ballot should reduce the demographic disparities in voter turnout because the benefits of added convenience apply to all voters rather than those who self-select to participate in the program.
- 6) In VBM elections, ballots must be sent to all registered voters, including inactive voters.
- 7) Vote by mail elections should be heavily publicized via mailings, newspaper ads, and radio public service announcements at the time ballots are mailed out and in the final days before an election.
- 8) Steps should be taken to deter, detect, and correct coercion and vote-buying while casting a Vote By Mail ballot.
- 9) Election officials should contact voters by phone, postcard, or e-mail if their ballot is deemed uncountable due to lack of a signature match and give the voter the opportunity to correct it.
- 10) Election officials should work closely with the U.S. Postal Service to ensure timely and accurate delivery of ballots.
- 11) Jurisdictions using Vote By Mail must also maintain in-person polling alternatives to allow disabled and language assisted voting on accessible equipment.
- 12) Election officials should allow citizens to use election headquarters as their voter registration address and then allow these citizens to pick up ballots at election headquarters during the entire VBM election period.

## Introduction

As part of a comprehensive analysis of how we conduct elections in the United States and our efforts to ensure that we “Get it Straight in 2008,” the Common Cause Education Fund has completed an in-depth study of voting by mail. All states allow some voters to cast ballots by mail, but there are significant variations between states. Some states require an excuse to request an absentee ballot such as health reasons or being absent from the state on Election Day. Other jurisdictions mail every voter a ballot for all or some elections. This paper defines a Vote By Mail election as one where every registered voter is mailed a ballot. Some publications refer to this practice as all-mail elections, which suggests incorrectly that there are no options for receiving or returning a ballot other than by the mail.

The first mail election was held in California in 1977. Oregon began using Vote By Mail (VBM) for local and special elections in the early 1980s and expanded the program to cover all of its elections in 1998. However, even in Oregon, some voters can and do cast ballots in person by hand-delivering ballots to drop box locations or voting in-person at an election office or through other voter assistance programs.

The question, then, is not whether to allow voting by mail, nor whether to require every citizen to vote by mail. Rather, it is to assess to what degree it makes sense to conduct elections partially by mail, through programs that allow any person to request a mail in ballot (as opposed to limiting it to certain absentee situations), or primarily by mail by sending every registered voter a ballot which most will also return via the mail.

Common Cause research has identified at least seven significant advantages to Vote By Mail elections, as well as several potential downsides that can be mitigated using sound election practices.

## Advantages

### **Voting by Mail Can Increase Turnout, By Four to Five Percentage Points in General Elections and Even More in Local/Off-Year Elections**

It stands to reason that making it more convenient to

vote would lead to more people voting. According to the U.S. Census, 19.9 percent of the 16 million people who were registered to vote but did not cast a ballot in the 2004 election cited the fact that they were too busy or had conflicting schedules as the reason they did not vote. Some 15.4 percent cited illness or disability. 9 percent said they were out of town, 3 percent said their polling place was inconvenient, 2.1 percent noted transportation problems, and 0.5 percent blamed weather conditions. That amounts to 38.8 percent of all non-voters who could have cast a ballot had it been easier to do so by voting by mail. For Hispanic voters, the number grows to 42.8 percent, for black voters it is 44.8 percent and for Asian voters it amounts to 57.5 percent of the reasons given for failing to vote.<sup>1</sup>

A 2004 survey by the John F. Kennedy School of Government similarly found 24 percent of respondents saying they had not voted because they were too busy to make it to the polls and 20 percent saying they did not have transportation to a polling place. Six percent of the non-voters said that they had planned to vote but turned away after facing long lines.<sup>2</sup> While there is a chance that some of these voters are merely making excuses and self-reporting in polls is not a fail-safe measure, these numbers suggest that allowing voters to cast ballots by mail could make a difference for as many as half of non-voters.

There are strong anecdotal success stories of Vote By Mail elections being used at the local level to dramatically increase turnout, at times doubling or tripling it.

Helena, Montana, resident Joe Hollowell voted for the first time in ten years in Helena’s VBM election in November 2007. He told his local paper that he likely would not have voted had it not been for the VBM election format.<sup>3</sup> Helena’s 2007 local election, its first using VBM ballots, saw the highest voter turnout ever recorded for a local election at 61.5 percent. In 2005, the figure was 30.9 percent and the previous record was in 1979 at 49.9 percent. Helena’s 30-year average turnout for local elections was 32.8 percent. Missoula, Montana, also used VBM elections for the first time in 2007 and saw a turnout of 46 percent, triple the rate of the 2005 election.

Colorado has allowed local governments to use VBM elections since 1999 for local elections held in odd numbered years. Colorado Springs used a VBM election in 2007 and 2003 and saw 41 percent and 58 percent turnouts respectively. (The 2003 race featured 28 candidates running for only 4 seats, so this competition undoubtedly also drove turnout.) In between these elections, the city used a polling place election in 2005 and saw 15 percent turnout. Denver used VBM elections for its mayoral race in 2007 and saw a 41 percent turnout. This was a little lower than the 2003 turnout at a polling place election (that featured a hotly contested mayor's race) which had 46 percent turnout, but much higher than the 1999 election which saw 26 percent turnout in a race similar to 2003.

Seal Beach, California, held a local VBM election in March 2006 and saw a turnout of 35 percent, eight points higher than the previous comparable election. California's Contra Costa County held its first VBM election in June 2004 to adopt a school parcel tax. Turnout was 52.9 percent, higher than the two previous school parcel tax elections which saw 23.2 percent turnout (March 2002) and 52.4 percent in March 2004 (also a presidential primary election.) The fact that a special election on a school parcel tax surpassed turnout for a presidential primary is impressive.

But, these and other anecdotal successes about VBM elections run the risk of comparing apples to oranges because so many other factors can influence voter turnout ranging from how hotly contested a contest is to what issues are on the ballot. We know, for instance, that turnout in presidential elections in Oregon garnered 70 percent of the voting age population in 1992 (ranking 8<sup>th</sup> nationally) and 60 percent in 1996 (ranking 10<sup>th</sup> nationally) prior to adoption of VBM elections for presidential races. Turnout was 65 percent in 2000 (ranking 10<sup>th</sup> nationally) and 70 percent in 2004 (ranking 7<sup>th</sup>).<sup>4</sup> These numbers would appear to suggest little change from VBM in presidential elections, but there could have been other factors that were either driving turnout up or down and masking the impact of VBM.

A team of academics headed by Paul Gronke at the Early Voting Information Center at Reed College has attempted to overcome the shortcomings of anecdotal evidence by looking at elections from multiple states from 1980 to 2004 and controlling for other variables

that can influence turnout such as the number of ballot measures, the closeness of major races, and demographic differences. They find an average increase in voter turnout within Oregon of 4.7 percent due to VBM elections in presidential elections.<sup>5</sup>

The state of Washington provides an excellent laboratory as counties have independently been shifting to VBM elections over the past several years. This creates many opportunities to measure VBM turnout in some counties compared to polling place turnout in other counties during the same election. Gronke finds a 4.5 percent increase in voter turnout in Washington as a result of VBM balloting from 1960 to 2006.<sup>6</sup>

In Switzerland, voting by mail has increased turnout 4.1 percent for the years 1970 to 2005.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than sparking participation among citizens who never vote, it appears that the added convenience of voting by mail serves primarily to retain higher participation among those voters who tend to vote in general elections by making it easier for them to vote in traditionally lower-interest local, special, or nonpartisan elections.<sup>8</sup>

### **VBM Can Significantly Reduce Election Day Logistical Problems**

#### *Equipment Failures*

Polling place elections require a large number of steps to go right. Voters must get to polls that open on time, poll workers must be deployed with adequate training, and there needs to be sufficient numbers of properly-working and well-secured voting machines. All too often, something goes wrong. In 2006, many Maryland polling places did not open on time because poll workers did not have the appropriate plastic cards to activate election machines. In Sarasota, Florida, more than 18,000 votes were not recorded in the 2006 congressional elections, most likely due to errors with touch screen voting machines. Vote By Mail solves these problems because it provides voters with plenty of time to cast ballots and avoid long lines while also providing election officials with ample time to count and process ballots. Because VBM uses paper ballots, it avoids the many concerns about electronic voting machines that lack an audit trail to use in cases of recounts or failure of tallying equipment. Two academic teams have concluded that VBM programs offer a more

accurate vote count than traditional elections.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Equipment and Poll Worker Shortages*

In 2004, Ohio saw long lines at many polling places as a result of not having deployed enough electronic voting machines to each location. At Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, for instance, 1,300 voters waited in line to use just two voting machines. Denver, Colorado also saw long lines in 2006 due to election problems; many people gave up and did not vote as a result. For the 2004 election, the Election Administration Commission estimated that the country as a whole faced a shortage of more than 500,000 poll workers.<sup>10</sup> Conducting elections entirely by mail can dramatically reduce the need for Election Day poll workers. Moving to partial mail programs such as permanent absentee systems can considerably reduce Election Day pressures on poll workers and yield shorter lines for voters. Mailing every voter a ballot can reduce the problem further and allow election officials to rely more heavily on professional staff to conduct elections.

#### *Bad Weather/Disasters*

A Vote By Mail program is less likely to be disrupted by bad weather, a natural disaster, or possibly something worse. As one example, Tillamook County in Oregon uses an VBM system for elections. In November 2006, 70 percent of registered voters cast their mail-in ballots even though on Election Day some 13 inches of rain fell and the governor had declared a state of emergency. Had Tillamook relied on a one-day polling place process, its turnout would likely have been dramatically reduced. It is worth remembering that September 11, 2001, was a local Election Day for New York City. Election Days are symbolic of our democracy and important to our government functioning so they could be possible targets for attacks in the future. Spreading Election Days into Election Weeks through voting by mail makes them less vulnerable to any form of disruption.

#### **Vote by Mail Provides Additional Opportunities for Voter Mobilization**

Civic groups and political parties in Oregon have grown to love the Vote By Mail program because it gives them an opportunity to organize Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) over a multi-week period. Rather than focusing on a 12-14 hour period to contact and mobilize voters, organizations can systematically canvass their

members by phone or door-to-door to encourage their participation and can track those who vote, and then refocus repeat communication only with those voters who have not yet returned their ballots.

One study of absentee voting found that expanded opportunities to vote absentee with few restrictions did not by themselves yield to greater turnout. But, states where political parties and interest groups conducted voter mobilization drives among absentee voters did see increased voter turnout.<sup>11</sup> The same should hold for elections conducted primarily by mail.

While it is difficult to quantify, the opportunity for greater person-to-person contact during extended voter mobilization drives may more than offset one downside that some people see in VBM elections—the loss of a communal act of voting on one day in set locations. Some observers see the opportunity for voters to walk to the polls and stand in line together as an opportunity to transcend their personal lives and private interests and join together to act collectively as a voting public. While voters may still see others dropping ballots in mail boxes or drop-off sites in mail elections, it remains more of an individual act. But, if extended voting allows your neighbors to continue dropping by your house in the weeks before an election until you've sent in your ballot, the entire process could boost civic engagement and interaction beyond what is typically seen in polling place elections.

Some have argued that the extended voting period of Vote By Mail makes political campaigns more expensive. This conclusion is based upon the false premise that there is a set cost for any political campaign. Rather, candidates will spend as much as they can raise in order to win an election, unless they are so assured of their victory that they can save funds in a war chest for future campaigns. A campaign's spending calculations have to do with how much it can raise and what an opposing campaign is spending as opposed to any set "cost." However, it certainly is the case that Vote By Mail elections provide campaigns with another avenue for spending money on extended GOTV that they would not otherwise have. This could increase the disparity between heavily financed campaigns and poorly financed campaigns. On the other hand, GOTV efforts are something that can be conducted with volunteers, so there is also potential for grassroots campaigns to be more competitive with deep-pocketed

competitors in VBM elections. However, the real solution to distortions of the political process through big money is through campaign finance reform.

**Recommendation #1:** In order to fully realize potential increases in voter turnout, states should provide candidates, parties, and interest groups with free lists of registered voters and update them at least twice a week during the voting period so that both parties and voters can see whose votes have been received. This allows GOTV efforts to focus only on those voters who have not yet cast ballots.

**Vote by Mail Can Reduce the Impact of Last Minute Negative Campaigning (but also the value of any late-breaking information.)**

Because many voters will cast their ballots weeks before Election Day, campaigns cannot wait until the last few days to launch their final messaging. While candidates will always critique their opponents when they see an advantage in doing so, the extended voting period of VBM means that their opponents will be more likely to have time to respond to charges.

The flip side of this advantage is that when new information does break late in a campaign, those voters who have already cast ballots will have made their decision without the benefit of that information. This dynamic will tend to push news outlets, candidates, and other political players to get information out well ahead of Election Day, which reduces the effectiveness of last minute sneak attacks and is generally beneficial. But, there will be instances where dramatic events, perhaps even the death or withdrawal of a candidate, will occur after many citizens have voted by mail.

In VBM elections, citizens do retain the ability to wait until Election Day to cast their ballot if they chose to personally deposit their ballot in a drop box or vote in-person. Many citizens, especially those fairly certain of their choices, will be willing to accept the risk that new information in the final days of a campaign could change their mind about an election in exchange for the added convenience of voting early. Undecided voters may chose to wait. In allowing citizens to vote early (either in person or by mail), society makes the judgment call that it is willing to accept these tradeoffs as individuals choose to make them.

**Voting By Mail Can Provide Greater Time to Deliberate About Choices**

When casting a ballot in a traditional polling place, voters may feel rushed to complete their ballots. Especially if they have waited in a long line to reach the polling place and perhaps taken time away from work or family responsibilities, voters naturally want to get the process over quickly and may not take as much time as they should to consider their choices or complete the voting process carefully enough to ensure that they made no errors in casting their ballot.

There is no conclusive data on whether voters actually take advantage of the greater time available to research their voting choices while voting at home. However, there are strong indications that when given a chance, many voters prefer to fill out their ballot at home, enjoying greater time to deliberate and research their choices. In the 2004 elections, 20 percent of voters cast ballots by mail nationwide, indicating a strong voter preference.<sup>12</sup> A recent survey found 81 percent of Oregonians prefer voting by mail now that the state has shifted entirely to VBM elections.<sup>13</sup> In the 2006 general elections, 85 percent of voters in Washington cast their ballots by mail (where 33 of 39 counties conducted VBM elections)<sup>14</sup> as did 42 percent of Californians through a permanent absentee program.<sup>15</sup> Citizens are in effect voting with their feet by flocking to Vote By Mail programs when given the opportunity.

**VBM Can Save Money and Time**

Because VBM greatly reduces the number of polling places, poll workers, and voting machines necessary to conduct elections, it can lower costs. There are increased costs of signature verification, public education, and maintaining drop boxes and early in-person voting centers, but empirically these costs have not outweighed the savings. Oregon has measured a real reduction in costs as a result of switching to VBM elections. The total election cost in the 1998 in-person primary election was \$3,396,272. The total election cost in the 2000 primary election was \$2,812,481, saving Oregonians \$583,791.<sup>16</sup> Overall, Oregon estimates a 17 percent savings due to VBM elections.<sup>17</sup> However, other states should remember that Oregon gradually built up its Vote By Mail infrastructure over decades before switching to elections conducted primarily by

mail.

Beyond savings to the government, voting by mail can save citizens time, which for many people carries a monetary value. Many citizens would much rather pay the postage costs of mailing in a ballot than take an hour off of work to cast a ballot in person. On the other hand, some have argued that the cost of postage could create a hurdle to voting akin to a poll tax for those citizens who cannot afford it. For some elections, return postage can exceed a regular first class stamp, which can create unusual postage amounts that citizens may not normally have on hand.

**Recommendation #2:** All Vote By Mail programs should maintain opportunities for citizens to cast a vote in person if they chose to do so. This allows voters to avoid the cost of postage and provides an alternative for those with concerns about the U.S. Postal Service. Oregon's program has a system of drop boxes where voters can deposit sealed ballots with no postage costs. Drop boxes should be in staffed locations (libraries, schools, fire-houses, post offices) or secured and bolted down so they cannot be opened or removed. Voters should also be able to cast ballots in private booths at vote centers staffed with trained election workers in the days leading up to and on Election Day. Further, state or local government should cover the cost of postage for any ballot that is sent with insufficient postage. Some jurisdictions might find it cheaper to simply pay all the return postage costs if doing so qualifies for sufficient bulk postage discounts.

### Signature Matching Avoids Fraud with Fewer Problems Than Photo ID Requirements

While voter fraud is extremely rare in the U.S., the few examples of fraud that have been unearthed often involve absentee ballots. The potential exists for someone to receive a ballot that was meant for another voter through stealing mail or simply taking a blank ballot that was mailed to a previous occupant of a residence.

**Recommendation #3:** In order to avoid fraudulent ballots, Vote By Mail programs should adopt the practice of requiring voters to sign ballot envelopes and comparing those signatures to the signatures on the voter's registration file. Officials can maintain privacy

of the signature through effective envelope design. This process requires a statewide voter registration database that includes scanned signatures, something that should now be achievable in every state due to the provisions of the Help America Vote Act. Election workers must also use a statewide database to ensure that nobody can cast more than one ballot either through requesting a replacement ballot or voting both by mail and in-person.

Using a signature match for mail in ballots is a superior method for preventing fraud than requiring voters to present photo ID at polls. Unlike photo ID requirements (which can both disenfranchise many legitimate voters who either forgot their ID or do not have a picture ID, and also slow down the voting process causing long lines). Vote By Mail allows election officials to compare signatures on the outside of a sealed voter envelope with the signature of a voter given during their registration. This signature verification, the same system this is used to verify signatures on voter petitions that qualify candidates or initiatives for the ballot, allows for greater accuracy and can apply to all voters without discrimination. Oregon has been remarkably free of allegations of fraud in its VBM program. In 2004, one group did claim that six voters had voted twice using VBM, but further investigation revealed that in five cases the claim was false and the sixth case was already being investigated by local elections officials.<sup>18</sup>

### Potential Problems and Mitigation Techniques

**Boosting Turnout Among Existing Voters Without Bringing in New Voters Might Further Skew the Electorate to be Older, Whiter, and Better Educated than the Population at Large (but, at least one example shows VBM does the opposite.)**

The existing American electorate does not accurately represent all eligible voters, to say nothing about the entire population that includes non-citizens and non-eligible voters (such as former felons in some states.) As a result, our societal decision-making suffers from not fully capturing the collective wisdom of the people. Put more starkly, our government lacks the full legitimacy of a government of, by, and for the people

when it is selected by an unrepresentative subset of the people.

For example, a recent Public Policy Institute of California survey found that 82 percent of Californians were eligible to vote but only 56 percent were registered. Registered voters were disproportionately white, older, and better educated than non-registered citizens who are eligible to vote. They also differed considerably on some policy matters, with 49 percent of voters saying that they prefer an active government with higher taxes and better services while two-thirds of non-registered but eligible voters do. California voters approve of the state's Proposition 13, which limits property taxes, by 56-33 percent while those non-registered oppose it 47-29.

Other studies have found that beyond registration, there are real policy differences between voters and non-voters (even those who may be registered). For instance, 31 percent of voters feel that the government should guarantee jobs for people, while 46 of non-voters feel this way. Some 44 percent of voters feel that the government should provide universal health insurance for all citizens while 52 percent of non-voters support this idea. Self-described moderates are underrepresented among those who vote, with 30 percent of voters calling themselves moderate compared to 42 percent of non-voters while conservatives are overrepresented by an 8 point spread. A robust 73 percent of non-voters think it should be easier to organize a union while 60 percent of voters do. A final example: 68 percent of voters think there should be more federal assistance to schools while 80 percent of non-voters do.<sup>19</sup>

Since VBM election programs seem to primarily boost turnout among the existing voter pool (which is skewed demographically and politically) rather than expand this pool to make it more accurately represent the populace, it is possible that VBM elections or any program that increases voter convenience will somewhat exacerbate the discrepancy between voters and non-voters.<sup>20</sup> While this theory is potentially important, existing data have not confirmed it.

**Recommendation #4:** While it is untenable to argue that we should avoid making voting more convenient for existing voters for fear of boosting their turnout, states should not view VBM as a solution to the deeper

problem of complete non-participation by much of the eligible electorate. Rather, states should pursue programs to register all eligible citizens, during high school for instance, to maintain these registrations when people move through lifetime registration policies that use U.S. Postal Service change of address data, DMV data, and tax data to automatically update voter registrations, and offer Election Day Registration to catch anyone who slips through the cracks. Increasing voter choices on Election Day through reforms such as fusion and instant runoff voting and programs such as full public financing would go even further by producing candidates that might have greater appeal to those citizens who are disinterested in current candidates and politics.

Aside from primarily Vote By Mail elections, there are also indications that those citizens who chose to participate in permanent absentee voter programs (now called permanent vote by mail in California and Colorado) also are not a representative subsample of the electorate as a whole. For instance, 31 percent of participants in California's permanent absentee program are over the age of 65 while only 19 percent of all registered California voters are this age. Three quarters of the permanent absentee voters are white non-Hispanic compared to two-thirds of registered voters. Just 13 percent of the permanent absentee voters are Latino while 21 percent of registered voters are.

**Recommendation #5:** In states that currently have permanent absentee voter programs, moving to elections where every registered voter is mailed a ballot should reduce the demographic disparities in voter turnout because the benefits of added convenience apply to all voters rather than those who self-select to participate in the program. Adopting local pilot programs, such as those in Colorado, would be a good way to gather data on the impact upon various demographic groups.

There is at least one example where adopting a Vote By Mail format significantly boosted the percentage of Latino and African American voters in the electorate.

Voters in heavily Latino districts in Denver, Colorado, trailed the city as a whole in turnout by 14 points during a May 2005 in-person local election. In contrast, these districts lagged by only three percentage points in the

May 2007 local election that was conducted entirely by mail.<sup>21</sup> Denver's first Vote By Mail election in 2001 saw a citywide increase in turnout of 17 points compared to its 1999 polling place election, but heavily Latino precincts saw an increase of 55 percent.<sup>22</sup>

The numbers are similar for heavily African American districts.<sup>23</sup> In the May 2005 in-person election, heavily African American districts saw an average turnout of only 10.5 percent. This trailed the overall city turnout, which was 25 percent (still low). But, in the May 2007 local election conducted primarily by mail, turnout in these same African American districts was 40 percent, only three points lower than the city as a whole, which saw higher overall turnout at 43 percent. Precinct 807, which has the highest African American population at

*mailing* to all voters, which appears to significantly narrow the gap in turnout in heavily Latino precincts.

Denver's inactive policy means that the turnout ratios in the Vote By Mail elections are inflated because they do not include the least active segment of the electorate. But, this flaw was constant among voters of all races, so it remains the case that relative to the city as a whole, Latino and African-American districts saw an increase in participation in the Vote By Mail elections.

**Recommendation #6:** In VBM elections, ballots must be sent to all registered voters, including inactive voters. Mailing ballots only to voters deemed "active" by virtue of their recent participation in elections deprives many voters the opportunity to cast a ballot.

### Ethnic Turnout in Denver's In-Person and VBM Elections

	2004 Turnout In-Person	Difference from citywide	2005 Turnout In-Person	Difference from citywide	2007 Turnout All-Mail	Difference from citywide
Citywide	79.06%	--	25.11%	--	42.63%	--
Latino	42.38%	<b>-36.68%</b>	11.07%	<b>-14.04%</b>	40.10%	<b>-2.53%</b>
Black	40.23%	<b>-38.83%</b>	10.58%	<b>-14.53%</b>	39.81%	<b>-2.82%</b>

78.60 percent, saw turnout that was 39 percent lower than the city as a whole in the 2004 in-person election, 15 percent lower than the city as a whole in the 2005 in-person election, but *4.25 percent higher* than the city as a whole in the 2007 VBM election. Switching from polling place to VBM elections narrowed the gap in both Latino and African American turnout by about 11 percentage points.

#### Poorly Done Mail Balloting Can Disenfranchise Inactive Voters

Common Cause research in Denver, Colorado, uncovered the fact that many voters did not receive ballots in the mail during a recent VBM municipal election because they had failed to vote in the previous year's November election and had been marked as "inactive." This policy led to a decline in the electorate by 38 percent citywide and a decline of 50 percent within heavily Latino precincts.<sup>24</sup> It is important to differentiate this policy of *failing to mail* to inactive voters in Vote By Mail elections, which does have a negative effect on Latino voters, from the policy of

#### Poorly Implemented VBM Programs Can Reduce Turnout (at least in general elections).

California law currently allows election officials to conduct VBM elections in precincts that have fewer than 250 voters. These precinct lines can change from election to election, so voters in these areas sometimes find themselves needing to go to a polling place while other times needing to vote by mail. Further, there is no statewide, or even citywide public education campaign to inform these voters about how to vote. The result is confusion and lower turnout. One recent study found a 2.9 percent decline in turnout in these small VBM districts during general elections. Interestingly, despite these problems, turnout was still 7.6 percent higher in local special elections in these VBM precincts.<sup>25</sup>

**Recommendation #7:** Vote By Mail elections should be heavily publicized via mailings, newspaper ads, and radio public service announcements at the time ballots

are mailed out and in the final days before an election. States should use some of the savings achieved by not staffing polling places to fund vigorous public education. Conducting mail elections in only a few precincts is not advisable.

### There are Potential Problems with Voter Coercion (but also some upsides).

When voters fill out their ballots away from a voting booth, whether in an absentee program or a VBM election, there is the chance that they will be unduly influenced by another person who watches them vote. This could come in the form of a family member, employer, or member of their church or labor union who wants to influence how they vote, or in the form of outright vote-buying from people offering cash or other goods (cigarettes, food) in exchange for certain votes. Elderly or disabled voters could be especially vulnerable to suggestions on how to vote by those assisting them.

The evidence from Oregon indicates that neither coercion or vote-buying has been a problem in their VBM elections. One study from Oregon in 1984 found no evidence of illegal influence on voting during VBM elections and another in 1996 study found that less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one percent of respondents felt pressure to vote a certain way by anyone in their presence while filling out a ballot.<sup>26</sup> Conducting a vote-buying scheme of sufficient scale to alter an election result would run high chances of being caught and facing prosecution.

**Recommendation #8:** Steps should be taken to deter, detect, and correct coercion or vote-buying while casting a Vote By Mail ballot. Mail in ballots should contain bold-face notices that ballots must be filled out privately unless a voter requires assistance and that it is a felony to offer anything in return for a vote or to coerce any person while they are filling out their ballot. Ballots should publicize telephone hotlines voters can use to report attempted coercion or vote buying and if necessary cancel a ballot that they filled out under coercion. Nursing homes should provide bi-partisan teams of election observers to assist residents who request help filling out ballots. While it is appropriate for family members to take sealed ballots to a mailbox or ballot drop-box, there should be limits on the number of votes a person can collect and deliver on behalf of others to avoid vote harvesting. Finally, voters

who fear coercion should have the opportunity to vote privately at a staffed vote center or election office within the final seven days prior to an election.

On the other hand, there are also real coercion problems with in-person polling where there have historically been efforts to intimidate ethnic voters through aggressive challenges or outright harassment at polling places.

For instance, in California one political party settled a 1988 lawsuit about voter intimidation after it hired uniformed guards to stand outside of Latino polling places in the 71<sup>st</sup> Assembly District in Orange County with signs saying that “non-citizens can’t vote.” In 2007, California Republican Party leaders urged the Republican Candidate Tan Nguyen to withdraw from his congressional race after his campaign sent out letters intended to scare Latinos away from voting. If voters receive a ballot in the mail from an election official, they may be less likely to be intimidated by scare tactics such as these.

Other examples abound. Hispanic voters in Gainesville, Maryland, reportedly faced threats during elections in 2007. The county registrar reported that “there was a group of people out there with a camera yelling at our Hispanic voters that if they were illegal, they were going to be deported.”<sup>27</sup>

White voters challenged voting eligibility of Asian American voters in an August 2004 Alabama local election that involved a Vietnamese-American candidate. African American voters were intimidated in Philadelphia by men carrying clipboards and driving cars designed to look like law enforcement vehicles.<sup>28</sup>

Voting by mail also reduces the chance for mischief through deceptive practices. For instance, a flyer distributed in Franklin County, Ohio, declaring that Democrats could cast ballots on the Wednesday following Election Day during the 2004 election<sup>29</sup> would have done little harm and been more easily refuted during an extended Vote By Mail ballot period. Also in 2004, a GOP lawsuit accused Kerry-Edwards campaign workers of making misleading phone calls in five Ohio counties directing voters to the wrong polling places. This sort of mischief is avoided in VBM elections.

### There are Potential Problems with Spoiled Ballots and Unconfirmed Ballots

When voters fill out ballots at home, they may not have the opportunity to ask for assistance or to confirm that their ballot has been marked successfully. This creates the potential for overvotes and unintentional undervotes using VBM. However, some historical data has shown better accuracy with mailed in ballots.

A study of a Los Angeles election in 2000 (using punchcards for both absentee and in-person voting) found that ballots cast in-person had ten times the undervote and four times the overvote rate of absentee ballots that were mailed in<sup>31</sup>. Since the passage of HAVA, punchcards have been largely eliminated and voters now have the opportunity to verify their ballots are marked correctly if they vote in person. This should reduce problems with in-person voting from now on.

### Combined Over and Under Votes Cast in Florida Elections

	02 (Gov)	04 (Pres)	06 (Gov)
Absentee (optical scan)	.68%	.67%	1.13%
In-person (DRE)	.86%	.41%	.98%

Florida has collected data on over and undervotes cast in person on its touchscreen equipment since 2002 compared to its absentee ballots cast via the mail.

In two of the three elections, in-person voting had somewhat lower ballot spoilage rates. But, remember that Florida was also the site of the 2006 touchscreen malfunction that lost 18,000 votes in a congressional race.

Oregon has found that it has reduced its numbers of spoiled ballots in every presidential election since 1992, despite the introduction of mail balloting for the 2000 and 2004 elections.<sup>30</sup>

In 2004, Oregon experienced a combined undervote and overvote rate of 0.8 percent for the presidential race using an VBM format. Washington state, which used VBM in most counties, also had a 0.8 percent residual vote rate. That year, ten states (AL, DE, FL, GA, HI, MD, MA, MI, NV, VT) experienced lower residual vote rates than Oregon and Washington, two states (NY and VA) experienced the same 0.8 percent rate, and 24 states experienced a worse rate (AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT,

DC, ID, IL, IN, IA, KT, MT, NE, NH, NM, NC, ND, OH, RI, SD, TN, UT, WV, WY). Oregon improved its residual rate from 1.6 percent in 2000 to 0.8 percent in 2004 and Washington likewise went from 1.1 percent to 0.8 percent, so there are techniques for improving rates even within the VBM format (most likely from switching from punchcards to optical scan ballots).<sup>32</sup>

There is also the potential for ballots to go uncounted because voters forget to sign their return envelope or the election officials deem that the signature does not match the one on file with the voter's registration. According to the Oregon Secretary of State's office, in the November 2004 election 1,057 ballots were rejected because the signature could not be verified. This compares to 606 in November 2003 and 602 in November 2002.<sup>33</sup>

**Recommendation #9:** Election officials should contact voters by phone, postcard, or e-mail if their ballot is deemed uncountable due to lack of a signature match and give the voter the opportunity to correct it. In close elections, officials should conduct manual recounts to minimize potential problems with undervotes and overvotes. If monitoring detects a problem with overvotes, ballots sent in early enough could be pre-screened prior to counting and the voter could be notified if overvotes are present.

### There are Potential Problems with Ballot Delivery via the U.S. Postal Service

Nearly everyone at one point in their life has had a bad experience with mail being lost or delayed. Yet, we trust the mail with financial transactions, voting by proxy for corporate shareholders and shipping valuables like diamonds that private carriers won't accept. The U.S.P.S. reports that in 2006, 95 percent of its overnight mail, 91 percent of its two-day mail, and 90 percent of its 3-day mail was delivered on time.<sup>34</sup> These numbers do not tell us, however, how often the mail was lost, only if it was on-time.

In Oregon's Multnomah County and Benton County, 6 and 7 percent, respectively, of the ballots were undeliverable in the 2006 elections.<sup>35</sup> This number could include postal errors, incorrect or out-dated registrations, and ballots that were returned due to death or relocation of the voter. Vote By Mail may have collateral benefits of keeping voter rolls clean, so long as postal errors are minimized and corrected.

**Recommendation #10:** Election officials should work closely with the U.S. Postal Service to ensure timely and accurate delivery of ballots, as well as with major institutions such as universities and assisted living centers. Every postal facility should be thoroughly searched for ballots by both postal workers and election staff upon the original sending out of ballots and on Election Day to ensure that all ballots are received. Officials should contact voters whose ballots are returned to confirm or correct their address and give the voter the opportunity to have a ballot resent or pick one up in person. Election officials should run public education campaigns to alert voters that they should receive ballots in the mail by set dates so that voters know to request one if they do not receive it. Finally, states or localities should consider using tracking software available from private companies that would allow each ballot to be assigned a unique barcode that would enable voters and election officials to track both delivery and return of ballots.

#### **There are Potential Problems with Language and Accessibility (but also considerable opportunities).**

Physical disabilities or language barriers can prevent eligible citizens from voting by mail. Not everyone is able to read a paper ballot they receive in the mail, or mark their votes with a pencil or pen.

Polling place elections have problems with language and accessibility as well. A 2000 GAO report found that 84 percent of polling places were not fully accessible to disabled voters.<sup>36</sup> For many physically disabled voters, it is easier to vote at home than to travel to a polling place. If properly done, VBM elections should be able to expand voting opportunities for all voters. For instance, without the need to staff huge numbers of polling places, election officials are more able to maintain a qualified staff of many different language translators at a smaller number of vote centers

and election headquarters.

**Recommendation #11:** Jurisdictions using Vote By Mail must also maintain in-person polling locations to allow disabled and language assisted voting on accessible equipment. Oregon offers voting assistance in an elector's home in some instances as well as at senior centers and election offices. Another option would be travelling voting vans that could visit neighborhoods, clinics, or assisted living centers upon request. Further, as is currently done with absentee systems in many instances, election officials should maintain hotlines for language assistance and in areas with significant non-English speakers should make ballots and voting instructions/information available in other languages upon request. Election officials should consult with local voting rights groups, civil rights organizations, military and college institutions, and disability rights groups when designing VBM programs.

Vote By Mail programs also have the potential to disenfranchise those voters who have no mailing address. This could include homeless populations, but also people who are travelling for extended periods and simply have no permanent residents. Some Native American tribal members do not regularly use U.S. Mail.

**Recommendation #12:** Election officials should allow citizens to use election headquarters as their voter registration address and then allow these citizens to pick up ballots at election headquarters during the entire VBM election period. Voters should also be allowed to use shelters, senior centers, welfare offices, tribal headquarters, or family members as addresses to register and to receive ballots.

## **Conclusion**

Every state allows some degree of voting by mail, ranging from absentee ballots given only with an excuse to Oregon's system of mailing ballots to every voter. Conversely, every state allows voters to cast a ballot in person should they chose to do so. The debate, then, comes down to how widely used voting by mail will be, not whether to have it at all. Studies show that the vast majority of voters like voting by mail and its use is increasing. Voting by mail can improve

turnout, reduce Election Day problems, and provide for a more deliberative, accurate, and accessible election if implemented correctly. Moreover, Vote By Mail needs to be assessed in comparison to other real world voting systems, which have significant flaws and shortcomings. Common Cause has offered several recommendations to ensure that we get it straight when it comes to mail elections.

## Acknowledgements

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