



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: ASSESSOR-COUNTY CLERK-
RECORDER-ELECTIONS

File #: 19-942

Board Meeting Date: 10/8/2019

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Mark Church, Chief Elections Officer & Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

Subject: Examining San Mateo's Adoption of the Voter's Choice Act, 2018 Election Cycle

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept the informational report regarding San Mateo's Adoption of the Voter's Choice Act, 2018 Election Cycle.

BACKGROUND:

The Chief Elections Officer commissioned an independent report (Report) to provide an unbiased analysis of the implementation of the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) in San Mateo County. The VCA represents the most significant change to the County's election model in decades, and it is vitally important to understand how the changes it brings impacts our County's voters, both in the aggregate and as members of specific groups.

The Report was prepared by Dr. Mindy Romero of the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP), a non-partisan civic engagement and outreach initiative sponsored by the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, which conducts research to inform policy for a more engaged and representative democracy. Dr. Romero is the founder and director of the CCEP. Her research focuses on political behavior and race/ethnicity, and seeks to explain patterns of voting and political underrepresentation, particularly among youth and communities of color in California and the U.S.

Dr. Romero's Report will be essential in the preparation for the upcoming Presidential Primary and General Elections. The data the Report provides on Vote Center placement, staffing, outreach, and other areas will provide a blueprint not just for San Mateo County's future efforts, but for the entire state.

DISCUSSION:

The Report's analysis of the County's implementation of the VCA shows that County voters had a largely positive experience with the new voting model. While only 68% of voters were registered to vote by mail when the VCA came into effect, utilization rates were significantly higher in the June and November 2018 elections - 93% and 88%, respectively. Among those voters who visited a Vote

Center, whether to vote or for the other services offered, over 90% expressed satisfaction. Nearly 60% of voters who visited a Vote Center travelled five minutes or less, while another 25% travelled 10 minutes or less.

Both the primary and general election saw historically high turnout rates, and a deeper dive into the data shows even more promising statistics among groups who had previously voted at lower rates. Turnout among Asian Americans and youth (age 18-24) increased compared to past elections. Young voters took particular advantage of Vote Centers, with 30% of all their ballots cast in-person in November 2018. Hispanic voters used Vote Centers at a greater rate than any other group, at 11.4% in the June 2018 election, and 18.1% in the November 2018 election. In both elections, the combined percentage of Hispanic voters who dropped off their ballot at Vote Centers, or voted in person, was over 30%.

Overall, tens of thousands of voters used vote centers for a range of services, including voting, language assistance, replacing damaged or lost ballots or envelopes, and conditional voter registration.

At the same time, the Report provides valuable insight into areas that require increased effort or attention. For example, when asked whether they had heard of the VCA, over half of all voters said they had not. Of those who had heard of it, the majority heard from materials provided by the Registration & Elections Division. This demonstrates that the County's relationships with local community groups, especially those represented by the Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee, need to continue and even be expanded to reach more voters, more directly.

The Report provides a roadmap that can be used not just for future elections in San Mateo County, but across the state. We are proud that our County continues to serve as a model for the successful implementation of the VCA.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with accepting the Report.