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\*\*voting member

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# CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF CLERKS AND ELECTION OFFICIALS

## JOSEPH E. HOLLAND, PRESIDENT

Santa Barbara County Clerk, Recorder and Assessor  
Registrar of Voters

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CACEO website: [www.caceo58.org](http://www.caceo58.org)

May 19, 2020

The Honorable Marc Berman, Chair, Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting  
State Capitol Building, Room 6011  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Thomas Umberg, Chair, Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional  
Amendments  
State Capitol Building, Room 2203  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Berman and Senator Umberg:

Thank you both for your work in creating a legislative package to address the pandemic conditions that not only exist now in California, but that also will likely exist or be worse at the time of the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. As we are in the planning stages for the general election, we appreciate your attention to this process.

In order to successfully adapt election processes of this magnitude via new laws or regulations this close to a major election, we believe it is critical to engage collaboratively with county elections officials. We are the officials entrusted with finding and securing the voting locations, recruiting and training the volunteers and making the election process successful for California's 21 million registered voters. Our expertise is crucial to making this unique election transparent, secure, accessible and successful.

When crafting your legislation, we ask that you consider the following factors:

- **In-Person Voting:** The state is imploring people to stay home in order to stay safe. To that end, Governor Newsom's recent Executive Order directs, and your joint letter dated May 6 advises, that counties mail a ballot to every voter. Besides the real and crippling financial burden for counties, COVID-19 has created an equally distressing impact on the administration of the November election, including:
  - Recruitment of poll workers, most of whom are in a vulnerable age group, and are currently declining to work in November
  - Safety of our poll workers and voters with personal protective equipment
  - Budget constraints that the state and counties have not experienced in more than a decade
  - Voting location agreements, as counties are having difficulty retaining locations and/or finding new locations that meet physical distancing requirements due to the pandemic

To meet this challenge, we recommend a ratio of one vote center to every 15,000 voters. Furthermore, there may be some traditional polling place counties who would like to explore moving to a vote center model for this general election, where this same type of solution may be cost prohibitive for other traditional polling place counties. Because of this, we ask that you craft legislation that gives counties flexibility to move to some type of vote center model like what was done in this year's special legislative elections, but that you do not demand this type of move for all counties.

- **Ballot Drop-Off Locations:** According to your joint letter, it is your intent to encourage statewide ballot drop-off locations to a minimum of two locations within a county or at least one location for every 15,000 registered voters (whichever results in more locations). As you know, the United States Post Office (USPS) has tens of thousands of mail collection boxes throughout the state. Now that all return mail ballots are mandated to be postage paid, we should leverage and maximize this infrastructure to deliver voted mail ballots back to each county elections official. Furthermore, to meet the COVID-19 crisis, we recommend that counties designate one ballot drop-off location for every 25,000 voters established no later than seven days before the election, recognizing that many traditional polling place counties not previously required to purchase and establish ballot drop-off locations may not have the infrastructure or resources necessary to procure and deploy these receptacles.

Additionally, Secretary of State Alex Padilla has regulations in place requiring elections offices to send two people to collect ballots from those drop boxes and has suggested that he would allow those two people to travel in two separate vehicles in order to comply with physical distancing requirements. Yet, his compromise will result in higher costs and more complexity for counties at a time when local jurisdictions can ill afford either. We ask that you work with us to reduce these regulations to only one person required to perform this service, which is the same number of individuals needed to transport ballots enjoyed by the United States Postal Service and by any voter entrusted to return a ballot under the provisions of California Elections Code 3017.

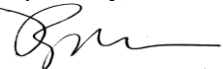
- **Number of Voting Days:** While some voters will participate early, the vast majority of voters who receive a ballot in the mail and who vote at vote centers wait until just before or on Election Day to vote. Statistics from Voter Choice Act counties show that relatively few voters participate in the early days of vote centers being open. While the reasons for this phenomenon vary, this behavior will not change for the November election even with education and outreach. Given the severe economic impact of this pandemic, we can meet this moment with other options like satellite offices and Remote Accessible Vote by Mail. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you shorten the vote center eleven-day voting period down to a maximum of four days. In addition, we ask for emergency legislation that all public schools and state colleges be closed from the Friday before Election Day to the Wednesday after Election Day so that we may use these facilities as voting locations. These facilities are visible, community-based, and are usually more ADA-compliant than other facilities.

While we would be happy to discuss with you even more ideas than those outlined above, we believe these suggestions recognize the dire financial situation being faced by county budgets and are crucial to the success of the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. Because we cannot know today what sorts of problems will exist for us in November, we ask for you to give counties flexibility whenever possible to address the needs of voters as they arise.

We appreciate the opportunity to engage in productive conversations with your offices to assist with your legislation. We must work together to maximize our success for November. To that end, we are collecting statistics and costs from counties to help inform our discussions with your offices.

If you have any questions regarding our requests, please contact Ryan Ronco, Placer County Registrar of Voters at rronco@placer.ca.gov or (530) 886-5690, or Tricia Webber, Santa Cruz County Assistant County Clerk, at tricia.webber@santacruzcounty.us or (831) 454-2409.

Respectfully,



Ryan Ronco  
Co-Chair, CACEO Election Legislative Committee  
California Association of Clerks and Election Officials



Tricia Webber  
Co-Chair, CACEO Election Legislative Committee  
California Association of Clerks and Election Officials

cc: Alex Padilla, California Secretary of State  
Joey Freeman, Chief Deputy Legislative Secretary for Policy, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom  
Rob Grossglauser, Pinnacle Advocacy LLC