Voter's Choice Act Report Summary: 2020 Primary and General Elections

Background

Elections Code section 4005(g)(1)(A) requires the Secretary of State to submit a report to the Legislature within six months of each election conducted under the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) that provides detailed information about voter registration and participation, including: voter turnout, voter registration, ballot rejection rates, reasons for ballot rejections, provisional ballot use, accessible vote-by-mail use, number of voters cast at a vote center, number of ballots returned at ballot drop off locations, number of ballots returned by mail, number of persons who registered to vote at a vote center, confirmed instances of voter fraud, and any other problems that became known to the county elections official or SOS during the election or canvass.

This final report combines findings and recommendations of several research institutions into one report, including data from the Secretary of State's centralized registration database, VoteCal, and reports commissioned on various topics from UCLA, USC, Caltech, and the California Budget and Policy Center. The report covers various demographic voting patterns and includes a comprehensive report of the data elements required by statute, including an emphasis on communities such as Native Americans and African Americans.

Key Findings

- VCA counties had higher voter registration rates, 85% in the Primary Election and 91% in the General Election, than other counties in the rest of the state, which had 79% in the Primary Election and 85% in General Election.

- In 2020, the 15 VCA counties accounted for approximately 50% of the state's registered voters in both elections — 10,388,737 voters in the March 2020 Primary Election and 11,020,222 voters in the November 2020 General Election.

- Data from the 2020 elections shows that 13 out of 15 VCA counties have a higher voter turnout when compared to non-VCA counties. While voter turnout increased, it did not increase at the same rate for all demographic groups.

- The data from the 2020 General Election shows that when examining voter turnout by race, White voters had a higher increase in voter turnout than their non-White counterparts. Latino voters had the highest gap in voter turnout at 9.8 points. Black voters had a voter turnout gap of 5.2 points, and AAPI voters had a voter turnout gap of 4.3 points.

- Voters statewide embraced the vote-by-mail option during the COVID-19 crisis. Vote by mail was the primary choice of voting in the 2020 elections, whether a voter decided to return their ballot by drop box or by mail.

Key Recommendations

Review of data and research revealed several opportunities to improve the delivery of the VCA in California:

- VCA counties are encouraged to continue working together to share best practices and increase voter education specifically around 11-day and 4-day vote center availability prior to each election. To assist counties with messaging to voters, the Secretary of State's Office has begun a statewide voter education and outreach effort entitled, "More Days and More Ways to Vote." This effort includes social media messaging, standard external signage at vote centers, and other materials to support awareness of voting options in VCA counties.

- VCA counties are encouraged to utilize community-based organizations and trusted messengers to help create culturally considerate messaging about voter registration and engagement in the electoral process.

- VCA counties are encouraged to continue activities that ensure all voters are educated about the signature requirements for their ballots and to continue to use effective methods to prevent signature issues.

- SOS will continue working with VCA counties to standardize data collection and reporting on county outreach efforts.