

— SAN MATEO COUNTY — CALIFORNIA VOTER'S CHOICE ACT SUPPLEMENT TO JANUARY 2020 – JANUARY 2024 ELECTION ADMINISTRATION PLAN FOR THE NOVEMBER 3, 2020 GENERAL ELECTION



OFFICE OF MARK CHURCH
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OFFICE OF
**ASSESSOR-COUNTY CLERK-
RECORDER & ELECTIONS**
COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

MARK CHURCH
CHIEF ELECTIONS OFFICER &
ASSESSOR-COUNTY CLERK-RECORDER

October 30, 2020

Dear Fellow Voters,

This supplement to the San Mateo County [Election Administration Plan](#) (EAP) for the period January 2020 through January 2024, contains plans specific to the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. A supplement was required to address changes to our EAP, necessary due to the unusual and unprecedented circumstances of holding an election during a worldwide pandemic. Quite unlike the November 5, 1918 midterm elections, when voter turnout nationally was lower than previous midterm elections due to a second wave of the Spanish flu, we expect record turnout locally for this election despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The next pages will direct you to the legislation and state guidance we will follow for the November election.

If you takeaway one message, let it be that San Mateo County voters will have the election services they have come to expect in a safe, secure and convenient manner.

San Mateo County was one of the first counties in the state to implement Vote by Mail (VBM) elections in 2018 under the [California Voter's Choice Act](#), and this will be our fifth election under the Voter's Choice Act. It is our standard procedure to automatically mail all registered voters a VBM ballot with an "I Voted" sticker and a postage-paid return envelope. Every voter is given the opportunity to cast their ballot in the convenience and safety of their own home, which is especially important in this COVID-19 environment.

If you prefer to vote in-person, 45 Vote Centers will be available. Three Vote Centers will be open for early voting on October 5. There will be numerous safety precautions in place to protect the health and safety of voters and staff. We will provide staff with personal protective equipment and provide voters with disposable items to minimize multiple contacts between voters. Commonly shared items and surfaces, such as the Ballot Marking Tablets and voting booths, will be cleaned between voters. These new routines will likely result in increased wait times for voters on Election Day.

A new option for most voters is the ability to cast their ballots through our Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) System. RAVBM allows voters to use any computer with access to the internet and a printer to mark their selections and print their ballot. San Mateo County was the first county in the state to deploy an Accessible Vote by Mail system in 2017. It was developed to assist voters with disabilities, and overseas and military voters. Information on how to access the RAVBM System is on our website, www.smcvote.org, and will be in both your Sample Ballot & Voter Information Pamphlet and your Official Ballot packet.

No matter the method of voting you prefer, I encourage you to vote, and I encourage you to vote early.

Sincerely,

Mark Church

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Overview of Election Changes

The San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division will follow changes to the California Elections Code mandated for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election under the provisions of [Assembly Bill 860](#) and [Senate Bill 423](#). We will also follow the [Election Administration Guidance under COVID-19](#) (revised 8/27/2020) by the Secretary of State, any additional revisions to the guidance, and implement health and safety practices at our Vote Centers designed to keep voters and staff safe in accordance with state and county public health orders.

For public health and safety, each Vote Center will be assigned a Health Ambassador/Greeter to ask voters to wear a face mask, answer questions on protective practices and remind voters to follow the markers to maintain physical distancing. Greeters, trained in disability etiquette, will roam every voter line, asking if anyone has questions or would like assistance. Once inside a Vote Center, check-in tables will have plexiglass shields to allow staff to assist voters without requiring physical distancing.

New to San Mateo County under Assembly Bill 860:

- Provide universal access to our Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) System.¹
- Extend the deadline to receive Vote by Mail ballots postmarked on Election Day to the 17th day after Election Day.²
- Processing of Vote by Mail ballots may begin on the 29th day before the election.³

Assembly Bill 860 requires counties to provide voters with a ballot tracking system for all Vote by Mail ballots. San Mateo County voters will continue to be able to verify when their ballot is received, and when it is counted, through our web site, www.smcvote.org at [My Election Info](#). Voters may also sign-up for the vote-by-mail ballot tracking system, [Where's My Ballot?](#), provided by the Secretary of State.

While [Senate Bill 423](#) authorizes counties to not have its vote centers open before the 3rd day prior to the November 3, 2020, statewide general election, San Mateo County will continue its practice of opening three vote centers 29 days before the election.

In May 2020, the Secretary of State's office added new state-mandated languages under [Elections Code \(EC\) 14201](#), language minority determinations. Three of those languages have been added to San Mateo County's required languages: Burmese, Hindi and Japanese. San Mateo County will provide and display facsimile ballots in these languages, and education and outreach for them.

The Registration & Elections Division added a Mobile Vote Center, a temporary building that can be moved by a truck, to provide even more voting options. The schedule includes two large local shopping centers, a small airport and high school on the Coastsides as well as the parking lot of an iconic venue, the Cow Palace. Locations were chosen based on the 15 criteria set forth in the California Voter's Choice Act⁴ and recommendations from the Center for an Inclusive Democracy siting tool.

¹ RAVBM System was created for voters with disabilities, voters living overseas or with the military and/or a military family member.

² Under current law, the deadline for receipt of a ballot postmarked by Election Day is three days following.

³ Under current law, counties can begin processing vote-by-mail ballots 10 business days before an election. Results will still not be released until after all polls close on Election night.

⁴ Criteria includes proximity to: public transit, communities with historically low vote by mail usage, population centers, language minority communities, voters with disabilities, communities with low rates of vehicle ownership, low-income communities, communities of eligible voters that are not registered, geographically isolated populations, as well as access to free parking, time and distance a voter must travel to reach a location, the need for alternate voting method for voters with disabilities, traffic patterns, the need for mobile vote centers in addition to those established by the law including on a public university or college campus.

Safe Voting Options

San Mateo County is prepared to hold the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election safely during these extraordinarily challenging times.

Vote Centers

The Registration & Elections Division began planning modifications to procedures and for Vote Centers in March 2020 to comply with CDC and County health standards in response to COVID-19.

We will have [45 Vote Centers this election conveniently located throughout the county](#). In addition to the 15 factors stated in the Voter's Choice Act, the Registration & Elections Division uses to identify the best Vote Center locations, and use of the Center for Inclusive Democracy's Voting Location Siting Tool, Vote Centers have also been surveyed to ensure space is available to ensure adequate physical distancing between each voter and voters and staff. All Vote Center locations are accessible.

Voter Center Representatives (VCRs) will receive both online training and in-person training (in training rooms reconfigured to allow physical distancing between people). While the main roles of VCRs have previously been to check-in voters, provide printed ballots or cards for voters to use the Ballot Marking Devices, VCRs will now also receive training on cleaning and disinfecting requirements. VCRs will be given guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (such as face masks and gloves). Vote Center staff will be increased to allow coverage for these additional responsibilities.

All VCRs receive training in disability etiquette and customer service. The principles contained within our disability sensitivity awareness training are to be courteous and offer help, and provide the voter the opportunity to clarify the support required. They will also be made aware of the existence of exemptions to wearing face coverings so as not to deny the fundamental right to vote to anyone for not wearing a face mask.

A voter not wearing a mask will be offered all options available for voting, including being issued a Vote by Mail to-go ballot, advised of the RAVBM System, provided with a paper ballot or a Ballot Marking Station set-up outside the Vote Center. VCRs are trained to ensure public safety while respecting the dignity of voters with disabilities, allowing those voters to vote without undue delay.

Vote Center workers will continue to receive training on the purpose of the facsimile copies of the ballots and how to provide a facsimile ballot, when requested by a voter. Training will include information on the new languages added since the March election. Signs for translated reference ballots in all languages serviced by the county will be updated with the three new required languages, Burmese, Hindi and Japanese.

We encourage all voters to vote early to avoid the lines on Election Day.

Vote by Mail

As one of the first five counties to implement the California Voter's Choice Act in 2018, San Mateo County is well-positioned to send all our registered voters [Vote by Mail ballots](#). Voters then have the option to return their ballot in the mail, use one of our Official Drop Boxes or bring their ballot to a Vote Center. We have [39 Drop Box Locations this election](#), an increase from 33 in the Primary Election, providing voters more convenient options to return their voted ballot. Drop box locations are selected under the same 15 Voter's Choice Act siting criteria as Vote Centers.

Ballot Printing

The Registration & Elections Division has worked with K&H Election Services, one of the largest ballot printers in the country for more than 12 years, and with them, we are prepared to produce more than 427,000 ballots to be mailed to San Mateo County's registered voters.

Ballot Mailing

Prior to each election, the Registration & Elections Division meets with staff from the United States Postal Service (USPS) to provide advance information on mailing dates, anticipated quantities and review any changes implemented by USPS.

San Mateo County has an excellent working relationship with USPS, and we work together throughout the election season to get ballots out and back in a timely fashion.

Voters can track their ballots through the Secretary of State's [BallotTrax in place of Bellatrix](#). Voters can receive automated alerts via text message, email or phone call on the status of their Vote by Mail ballot every step of the way by subscribing to "Where's My Ballot?" at [Wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov](#).

Replacement Ballots

While voters may request replacement ballots to be mailed to them through October 27 or go to any Vote Center to pick up one, for this election, to reduce wait times, voters may request a replacement ballot for pickup before visiting a Vote Center. Voters will find a request form on our website, [www.smcvote.org](#) or can call/text 650.312.5222 one day before pickup, to submit a request and select a location for pickup. Once their ballot is ready for pickup, they will receive an email with location-specific instructions.

Remote Accessible Vote by Mail System

For this November's election, all voters can use the [Remote Accessible Vote by Mail \(RAVBM\) System](#) to safely access, mark and print their ballot from any computer with internet access and a printer. This service has been a voting option for voters with disabilities to receive and mark their ballots independently and securely. It has also provided overseas voters and military voters with a way to vote in a timely fashion. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, this service has been expanded to all voters to make voting as easy and accessible as possible. Marked ballots must be returned to the Registrations & Elections Division via mail or Drop Box; local voters cannot return their ballots via email or fax.⁵

Ballot Drop Boxes

Beginning October 5, voters will have access to 39 Ballot Drop Box locations conveniently located throughout the county. Twenty-nine Drop Box locations are outdoors, making them accessible 24/7. Every box is secure, with indoor boxes containing security locks and fastening cables, and outdoor boxes being made of steel and bolted in-place into concrete. All ballot drop-boxes and their locations are physically accessible to voters with disabilities.

Teams of two will empty each drop box twice a week between October 5 and October 25, three times a week from October 26 to November 1, and at least once a day on November 2 and Election Day. Collected ballots are returned to the Registration & Elections Division for processing and secure long-term storage.

Curbside Drop-Off and Drive-Thru Voting

All 45 Vote Centers will have volunteers and staff to accept sealed ballot envelopes from voters in their cars. The curbside drop-off allows voters to drop their ballot off more quickly than having to open the Drop Box door. It also provides another option for people with difficulty walking, or other physical limitation, to drop their ballot off in an Official Drop Box.

At the San Mateo County Event Center, there will also be an option for voters to receive a paper ballot from their cars.

⁵ Military and overseas voters should refer to the [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#) for additional ballot return options.

Curbside drop-off and drive-thru voting allows voters in vulnerable groups to avoid potential exposure to COVID-19.

The teams will follow COVID-19 precautions, such as maintaining six-foot distance from each other, wearing face masks and using gloves to receive envelopes from drivers. Canopies will be set up to protect the volunteers and staff from the weather. A-frames will denote the path drivers should follow for curbside drop-off or drive-thru voting and remind voters to wear face masks when they speak to the Elections staff.

Ballot Counting

The Registration & Elections Division has the staffing and technology in place to ensure ballots are tallied accurately and efficiently. The Division replaced its tabulation system in 2019, and staff has had the opportunity to use the new equipment for the November 5, 2019 Consolidated Municipal, School and Special District Election and the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election. The new equipment allows us to process up to 50,000 Vote by Mail envelopes per hour.

Voter Education & Outreach

An election held during a pandemic can only be successful if voters are aware of their voting options and rights, and they are confident that voting is safe, secure and without barriers.

Effective education and outreach are achieved when information is delivered by a “trusted messenger”. Studies show that government agencies, community organizations, non-governmental organizations, and advisory committees serve as trusted messengers on election matters, which is why we will continue our collaborative outreach network to connect with voters.

Voter Workshops

The Registration & Elections Division will hold online workshops with community partners in place of in-person workshops due to COVID-19.

Workshops in September and October 2020 will be given to inform language communities and voters with disabilities of the upcoming changes to voting for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. Planning is in process at the time of this publication.

Text Messages to Reach Voters

In the absence of community events, the Registration & Elections Division will send text messages to reach an estimated 25,000 young voters, area residents who are eligible to vote but not registered and inactive voters.

The Division will cross-reference young voters, first-time voters and inactive voters in its database with mobile phone numbers in Political Data’s database. Up to three text messages will be sent to encourage young voters and first-time voters to vote. Messages will be sent by individuals working for TextSurge.

TextSurge will obtain information to contact county residents, over eighteen years old, in our lower registration/turnout areas (Daly City, East Palo Alto and unincorporated areas) to provide information on registering to vote. The Division will cross-reference the names and other identifying information obtained by TextSurge with its database to confirm the person is not currently registered to vote.

Finally, the Division will cross-reference inactive voters in the same lower registration/turnout areas with mobile numbers from Political Data to inform them they will not receive ballots in the mail from San Mateo County unless they contact the Division if they have not moved or they re-register to vote.

Postcard Targeting Areas with Lower than Average Registration

In addition to text messaging potential voters missed due to the lack of community events, the Registration & Elections Division will mail a letter-size postcard with registration information in four languages to nearly 100,000 households. The postcards will be delivered via USPS Every Door Direct Mail in parts of Daly City, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Redwood City, San Bruno, South San Francisco and unincorporated areas.

Summary of Changes to the Election Administration Plan 2020 – 2024 Appendix

Proposed Vote Center Locations

The Elections Division will increase the number of Vote Centers from 42 during the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election to 45 for the November 3 election.

There will be no Vote Centers opening 11 days prior to Election Day.

In addition to three new Vote Center locations, several locations have changed to allow room to maintain physical distancing and create one-way traffic patterns. New Vote Center locations were chosen with the same selection criteria as previous ones, the 15 selection criteria in the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA), community input and use of the Center for Inclusive Democracy's Voting Location Siting Tool.

Plans for the acquisition of two new self-contained Mobile Vote Centers were temporarily shelved. A portable building, with ramp for accessibility, was leased to replace one of these self-contained centers. Locations to host the Mobile Vote Center were chosen based on the criteria in the VCA, community input and use of the Center for Inclusive Democracy's Voting Location Siting Tool.

Ballot Drop Box Locations

We have increased the number of outdoor 24/7 locations from nine in March to 29 for November. Locations were chosen with the same selection criteria as previous ones, the 15 selection criteria in the California Voter's Choice Act and community input. Drop box locations are secure, accessible to voters with disabilities and located as near as possible to public transportation routes.

Vote Center layouts

New sample have been developed for use in larger rooms to allow for social distancing and where possible, one-way traffic flow.

Community Partners

We are pleased to add three additional community-based organizations to our community partner section.

Community Events Calendar

All in-person public-facing events were cancelled in the wake of COVID-19 following the March 3 election. Five virtual events are currently scheduled.

Media Partners

Seven media partners have been added.

Example: Direct Voter Contact

Postcard 1 included the table on the Vote Center dates, number open and hours as voters have come to expect. Information on COVID-19 preparedness and availability of RAVBM System to all voters was added.

Postcard 2 and 3 will also add information on our COVID-19 preparedness and availability of RAVBM to all voters was added.

Public Comments

All comments received during the Public Review Periods are published below with responses from the Registration & Elections Division.

September 29, 2020

Via electronic mail

Dear Mr. Church:

We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on San Mateo County's Election Administration Plan (EAP) Supplement, which addresses changes related to COVID-19. Disability Rights California (DRC) is the protection and advocacy system for Californians with disabilities and is specifically charged with ensuring "the full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote and accessing polling places." (See 42 U.S.C. § 15461.)

Comments on Voter Centers and Drop-Boxes:

Vote Center and "Pop-Up" Vote Center Relocations and Accessibility

San Mateo County's EAP Supplement states that "*several [vote center] locations have changed to allow room to maintain physical distancing and create one-way traffic patterns*" and that "*[v]ote [c]enter locations which changed aimed to remain within the general proximity of previously used locations.*" (p. 6) Although we understand the difficulty of locating vote centers during a pandemic, the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) still requires that you consider all 15 factors under section 4005(a)(10)(B) before relocating vote centers. Although we realize that you likely considered factors, the discussion of them should be something more than describing new locations as "within the general proximity" of the previous ones. Please discuss your consideration of these factors—particularly the "proximity" factors (e.g. whether the location is proximate to the disability community). (See Elec. Code § 4005(a)(10)(B)(v).) The same applies to your discussion of the two new "pop-up" vote center locations.

DRC also encourages San Mateo County to confirm the physical accessibility of all vote center and "pop-up" vote center locations. (See Elec. Code §§ 1604, 4005(a)(4)(C).) We think it is a best practice to explain that all vote center locations are accessible in election planning documents.

Drop-box Accessibility & New Locations

As with vote centers, the VCA requires that ballot drop-boxes (and their locations) be physically accessible to voters with disabilities. (See Elec. Code § 4005(a)(1)(B).) DRC urges San Mateo County to include this fact in its EAP Supplement. This will assure voters with disabilities that they will be able to access all of San Mateo County's drop-box locations.

DRC further encourages San Mateo County to confirm its consideration of the 15 factors listed under VCA section 4005(a)(10)(B) (particularly the "proximity" factors) for each of the three new drop-box locations.

Curbside Voting

San Mateo County's EAP Supplement should discuss curbside voting. Curbside voting is an important accommodation for voters who may have difficulty physically accessing vote centers (even those that are accessible). This election, curbside voting allows voters in vulnerable groups to avoid potential exposure to COVID-19. We also think it is best practice for San Mateo County to discuss curbside voting on its elections website.

Finally, please include notice of any COVID-19 precautions (e.g., workers will bring sanitizer and disinfected equipment to curbside voters) that would affect the provision of curbside voting.

General Comments:

Allowing All In-Person Voters to Vote Without Undue Delay

The EAP Supplement states that “[poll workers] will [] be made aware of the exemptions to [the California Department of Public Health’s (CDPH) Face Covering Guidance] so as not to deny the fundamental right to vote to anyone for not wearing a face mask **if that person is complying with the guidance.**” (p. 3 (emphasis added).) Yet the Secretary of State’s (SOS) recent CC/ROV (“Election Administration Guidance under COVID-19”) is clear that poll workers must not “unduly delay a voter without a face covering”—and similarly that “[e]lection workers **must not turn a voter away for lack of a face covering.**” (See CC/ROV Memorandum No. 20154 (July 21, 2020) at pp. 9, 20 (emphasis added).)

Thus, even voters who do not qualify for an exemption under the CDPH’s guidance cannot be unduly delayed or turned away from voting by San Mateo County poll workers, so long as those voters arrive to vote in-person. Please clarify the language in your EAP Supplement to reflect these important points in the SOS’s guidance.

Treating All Voters with Disabilities with Dignity and Respect

The EAP Supplement states that “A voter not able to wear a mask may be asked to vote outside or wait for other voters to leave to provide additional distance between this person and other voters.” (p. 3) Please confirm that poll workers enforcing this guidance will be fully trained on disability etiquette when serving voters with disabilities—including those who cannot wear face coverings. Poll workers should be able to ensure public safety while respecting the dignity of voters with disabilities (e.g., not “othering” those unable to wear face coverings), while allowing those voters to vote without undue delay.

Thank you for your willingness to be responsive to community and outside input. We appreciate the open line of communication we maintain with you and your staff. Please contact us with questions or comments at any time.

Sincerely,

Fred Nisen
Supervising Attorney for Voting Rights
Voting Rights Practice Group

Jason H. Connor
Staff Attorney for Voting Rights
Voting Rights Practice Group

Paul R. Spencer
Staff Attorney for Voting Rights
Voting Rights Practice Group

Registration & Elections Division Reply

Dear Mr. Nisen, Mr. Spencer and Mr. Connor:

Thank you for your comments and suggestions to our Election Administration Plan for January 2020 to January 2024 Supplement for the November 3, 2020 Election. The Registration & Elections Division greatly respects the expertise of the Disability Rights California in protecting and advocating for the rights of Californians with disabilities, and we rely on you as a partner, providing your expertise to us on how we can better serve individuals with disabilities in our communities.

You are correct, our Vote Centers, Mobile Vote Center, Pop-Up Vote Centers and Drop Box locations have always been selected following the criteria of the Voter’s Choice Act as well as community input.

We have added this information in this supplement. We have also added that all voting sites, drop boxes and their locations are accessible.

We saw this supplement as a document to be used in conjunction with our Election Administration Plan. In retrospect, we agree with you that it is a best practice to include this information in every election planning document. We are proud to state the criteria that goes into selecting our voting sites and to state all locations are accessible. Thank you for providing this best practice to this document. We will incorporate it into future documents.

We did not originally discuss curbside voting in the supplement as we had included it in our Election Administration Plan for January 2020 to January 2024. Thank you for pointing out the need to detail the changes required to carry out curbside voting in the COVID environment. We have added information in the supplement as well as our website.

Upon your advice, we have deleted the reference to the California Department of Public Health's Face Covering Guidance. To be clear, we will not turn away a voter who will not wear a face covering, and a voter without a face mask will not be unduly delayed (per CCROV Memorandum # 20154).

All Vote Center Representatives are trained in disability sensitivity. It is paramount to the Registration & Elections Division to treat all voters with disabilities with dignity and respect. It is our goal to treat all voters equally with dignity and respect.