

Meeting Minutes  
**Voter's Choice Task Force (VCTF)**  
Thursday, June 12, 2025, 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

**1. Welcome, Call to Order, Roll Call, and Declaration of Quorum**

Voter's Choice Task Force members present:

- **Dora Rose**, Deputy Director, League of Women Voters
- **Leslie Hernandez**, Civic Engagement Specialist, AltaMed Health Services
- **Deanna Kitamura**, Managing Attorney, Asian Law Caucus
- **Russia Chavis Cardinas**, Deputy Director, California Common Cause
- **Gabriel Taylor**, Senior Advocate, Disability Rights California.
- **Camila Chavez**, Executive Director of the Dolores Huerta Foundation.
- **Ellen Nash**, Chair/President of the San Diego Black American Political Association of California.
- **Petrina Branch**, Attorney
- **Dean Logan**, L.A. County Registrar of Voters
- **Bob Page**, Orange County Registrar of Voters
- **Donna Linder**, Stanislaus County Registrar of Voters
- **Melvin E. Levey**, Merced County Registrar of Voters
- **Matt Moreles**, Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters
- **Jesse Salinas**, Yolo County Registrar of Voters
- **Deva Proto**, Sonoma County Registrar of Voters
- **Art Tinoco**, Riverside County Registrar of Voters

Advisors:

- **Ethan Jones**, Chief Consultant, California State Assembly
- **Carrie Cornwell**, Staff Director, California Senate Select Committee

Secretary of State Staff:

- **Janelle Jackson**, Deputy Secretary for Outreach
- **Jim Patrick**, Deputy Secretary of Communications
- **Tristan Cormier**, Deputy Secretary IT
- **Robert Ullrey**, Assistant Deputy
- **Adam Quintana**, Policy and Planning Manager
- **Dana Davenport**, VCA Outreach Manager
- **Briana Rickets-Beck**, Policy Analyst
- **Katreena Alder**, Data and Reporting Manager

## **2. Special Remarks by Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.**

Thank you to those of you who have taken the time off to be with us today. I am really pleased to welcome the newly appointed members of the voter choice task force to this first meeting. We look forward to working with you to further efforts to protect and strengthen our democracy in the great State of California. Your voice and recommendations will be key in helping shape reports and policies that come to my office. I value your input, participation and recommendations that you may have for me and for the state legislature. We'll make sure that your voices are heard, including the issues that you bring forward.

Before we begin today's meeting, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work accomplished by those who served in the prior VCA task force, which was in place prior to January 1, 2022. I value and recognize their hard work, and I plan to present those of you who were members of the prior task force with certificates acknowledging your work and our appreciation for it. Those who were members of the prior VCA task force included:

- Bryan Blum, California Labor Federation
- Darren Chesin, State Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments
- Cathy Darling-Allen, Shasta County Clerk and Registrar of Voters
- Kathay Feng, Common Cause
- Rosalind Gold, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
- Catherine Hazelton, Future of California Elections
- Joe Holland, Santa Barbara County Clerk, Recorder, Assessor, and Registrar of Voters
- Margaret Jakobson-Johnson, Disability Rights California
- Ethan Jones, State Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting
- Deanna Kitamura, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles
- Malka Kopell, California State University, Sacramento - Center for Collaborative Policy
- Dean Logan, Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
- Raul Macias, American Civil Liberties Union
- Tammy Patrick, Bipartisan Policy Center
- Mindy Romero, University of California at Davis - Center for Regional Change
- Emily Rusch, California Public Interest Research Group
- Jesse Salinas, Yolo County Assessor/Clerk-Recorder/Registrar of Voters
- Trudy Schafer, League of Women Voters
- Michael Vu, San Diego County Registrar of Voters
- Marty Wilson, California Chamber of Commerce

These meetings are open to the public, so that people can provide input and participate, so please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you have suggestions or

comments. We have not yet chosen a chair for the task force. This inaugural meeting will be facilitated by La Kenya Jordan, Deputy Secretary of State. Those of you who might be interested in wanting to serve as chair or co-chair, please let us know. I always like volunteers because I know they work hard.

Once again, thank you to those who served in the past, we appreciate all of your hard work, and I want to welcome the new members to the task force. LaKenya will be introducing the new members momentarily. My office is always ready and available to listen to the task force, to hear what you have to say and help us work through some of the challenges that we face with the VCA, including financial issues. We believe that the VCA is valuable to voters and would like to expand it. We want to have your voice and your input. So once again, thank you for inviting me to be with you this morning and welcome to the task force.

### **3. Introductions of Voter's Choice Task Force Members**

LaKenya Jordan called on task force members to please introduce themselves.

**Melvin E. Levey:** Thank you for having me as part of the task force, I am the Registrar of Voters for Merced County. The VCA has been in Merced County for four years and I am very excited to be a part of this task force.

**Dean Logan:** Good morning, thank you LaKenya and Secretary Weber. L.A. County is an enthusiastic member of the VCA voting model. I am happy to be a part of it. I want to share with the group something I heard at the state LAAC meeting about a report from election observers from Asian Law Caucus and Common Cause, the data in the report shows that counties that have implemented the VCA are performing better, in terms of language access and accessibility for voters. This is something important to highlight. We are in an environment where there is instability at the federal level and there are questions about what will happen with the United States Postal Service. The VCA gives us flexibility to adapt to those things that we don't know.

**Matt Morales:** Santa Clara County implemented the VCA in 2020 and we are happy to continue to do so. The VCA has been extremely successful in Santa Clara County, and we are looking forward to crafting the next phase of this project.

**Bob Page:** Thank you LaKenya and Secretary Weber for the appointment to the task force. I look forward to communicating with other members and finding ways to improve this model.

**Deva Proto:** Hello, my name is Deva Proto. Sonoma County used a "VCA like" model in the 2020 elections due to the pandemic and fully implemented the VCA in 2022. We have been using it ever since. One of the things I like about the VCA is that it is more disaster resilient.

**Jesse Salinas:** Good morning everyone, I am thankful to be appointed to this task force and eager to see the ongoing discussions. Yolo County joined the VCA in November 2020 with a "VCA like" model and it worked really well. Yolo County had a historic high

voter turnout of 83 percent. I look forward to the conversation and I am excited about what we can do together.

**Art Tinoco:** Thank LaKenya and thank you Secretary Weber for the opportunity to serve on this committee. Riverside County implemented a “VCA like” election in 2020 and implemented the VCA in 2021. We have learned a lot along the way. I look forward to working closely with the task force and thanks again for the opportunity.

**Petrina Branch:** I am an attorney, and I am from San Diego County. I look forward to serving on this task force. I have volunteered for many years promoting voter education, voter registration and voter empowerment.

**Camila Chavez:** Our organization is based in Bakersfield. We have been working on implementing non-partisan voter education and outreach engagement since 2006. Tulare county is not participating in the VCA, and I am interested to learn more about that. Traditionally we work in several counties that include Kern, Tulare, Kings, Fresno and Los Angeles. We work with traditionally underrepresented voters, including immigrants, people of color and young voters. It’s an honor to be here.

**Russia Chavis:** I am deputy director of California Common Cause. The work of California Common Cause is to help oversee and monitor elections including those counties implementing the VCA. It is my hope that we can think of pro-democracy reforms that advance elections at a time when we are seeing an attack to erode many of the accomplishments that we have made so far as a nation and think of defensive strategies that counties can implement to ensure counties have what they need to run transparent, smooth, open and fair elections.

**Leslie Hernandez:** Thank you LaKenya and Secretary Weber for appointing me to this position and for allowing AltaMed to be a part of the task force. I work at AltaMed as a civic engagement specialist. AltaMed is an independent health center that currently have partnerships in both Los Angeles County and Orange County. Since 2018, AltaMed established a civic engagement department. AltaMed is looking into expanding their impact beyond clinical care for patients.

**Diana Kitamura:** I am now a managing attorney at Asian Law Caucus. We do poll monitoring with our partner Common Cause. The report that Dean mentioned shows the differences between VCA and non-VCA counties. I was in the stakeholder group that negotiated the VCA, and I am looking forward to having discussions on how we can strengthen our democracy here in California.

**Ellen Nash:** Our purpose is to advocate and amplify voices of black families in San Diego and other underserved communities. We are pleased to support the VCA task force. During the last election our organization advocated on behalf of having a vote center restored. Also, we partner with youth organizations while putting emphasis on the right to vote. Thank you for selecting me as a representative from San Diego in this

space. She looks forward to the meetings and advocating for the right to vote in California.

**Dora Rose:** Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the task force. The League is a non-partisan, grassroots organization that works to protect voters' rights. The League worked to help craft the VCA and worked to help ensure the implementation of the VCA in the state. Our goal is to approach the VCA through the lens of the voter experience and reduce the current participation gap. I'm happy to be here and to work together on the VCA.

**Gabriel Taylor:** Thank you for the opportunity to join the task force. The main goal of Disability Rights California is to ensure accessibility to voters and to ensure that voters are aware of all of the different opportunities to cast their ballot. One of the things we have seen is grater progress through collaboration. We are eager to join the conversation and make sure that voters with disabilities have a voice.

**Ethan Jones:** Thank you LaKenya and thank you Secretary Weber for putting together such a wonderful group of talented individuals with diverse perspectives that will contribute to a healthy discussion about the future of VCA.

**Carrie Cornwell:** I have been with the Senate Select Committee since late last year. I am impressed with the folks in this task force and happy to be included in an advisory role. I appreciate the SOS efforts to discuss the VCA and happy to facilitate communication back to the legislature.

**Donna Linder:** Like Sonoma County, we implemented a "VCA like" election in 2020 and then became VCA in 2022. As an elected official it was my goal to become a VCA county, so I was very excited to do that. I think it is a good opportunity for our voters to have the options that VCA allows for voting, and I am excited to be on this task force to see how we can bring the VCA up to date to meet our current needs as counties and advocates.

#### **4. Introduction of Secretary of State Staff**

LaKenya acknowledged the following SOS staff:

- Janelle Jackson, Deputy Secretary for Outreach
- Jim Patrick, Deputy Secretary of Communications
- Tristan Cormier, Deputy Secretary IT
- Robert Ullrey, Assistant Deputy
- Adam Quintana, Policy and Planning Manager
- Dana Davenport, VCA Outreach Manager
- Briana Rickets-Beck, Policy Analyst
- Katreena Alder, Data and Reporting Manager

#### **5. Overview of the Voter's Choice Task Force**

Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D., appointed members to the Voters' Choice Task Force on 5/13/2025. Each task force member will serve a 2-years term. If for any reason, someone can no longer serve, please notify our office. The Secretary of State's office will provide administrative oversight to the task force work to put together the reports to the Legislature. Your insight, input, viewpoints and experience will be necessary in putting those reports together and making recommendations of the legislature as required by statute.

The task force will also serve in an advisory capacity to the Secretary of State's office. We are committed to listening to what you have to say. We recognize that California is a diverse state, not just in population but also in languages and geography. We have smaller rural communities, and we have larger communities. We'll make sure that we are constantly listening about what is working and what may need improvement.

## **6. Task Force Role and Responsibilities**

The Voters' Choice Task Force was authorized by Senate Bill 1450. The statute provides for the scope and role of the task force.

- The Secretary of State shall establish a task force that includes representatives of all of the following:
  - County elections officials
  - Individuals with demonstrated language accessibility experience for languages covered under the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965
  - The Disability community and community organizations and individuals that advocate on behalf of, or provide services to, individuals with disabilities.
  - Experts with demonstrated experience in the field of elections.
  - The task force shall review elections conducted pursuant to Section 4005 and provide comments and recommendations to the Legislature within six months of each election conducted pursuant to Section 4005.

### **Public Comments:**

**Bob Page:** The CACEO does have a committee that is conducting discussions now and has been for a few months about VCA and recommendations that the CACEO may want to make. I don't know when this committee will be ready to share their recommendations.

**Jesse Salinas:** I just wanted to follow up. Thanks, Bob. There are discussions that are going to be had over the coming months. The goal is to provide some clarity as well from CACEO. We are hoping to have some good messaging and clear messaging from our association on this topic in the coming months.

## **7. County Data Presentation**

Good morning everyone, as mentioned by Lakenya. I'm here to briefly discuss some high-level takeaways from election data from the 2020 primary election to the 2024 general election. We have shared this information previously:

- Vote-by-Mail has become the most popular voting method for California's voters.
- Vote centers have high traffic on E-1 and Election Day.
- Vote centers are seeing a steady increase in vote center drop off, particularly on Election Day.
- The most popular voting method during the most recent election (2024 general election) or 81% of voters voted by mail while 19% voted in person.
- From E-10 through E-1, voters are primarily choosing to vote in-person.
- VBM vote center drop off increased around E-3 for in-person voters.
- Between E-4 and E-3 there was a very large jump in the number of in-person voters.
- Most voters vote on Election Day.

## 8. Strategies for Addressing VCA Challenges

- Vote center usage remains an issue due to low voter use during the 10 days prior to Election Day.
- The costs of elections are on the rise and many counties are making tough decisions to maintain or reduce budgets for elections.

### **Public Comments:**

**Dean Logan:** Thank you for the great work on the data. I have seen this presentation a couple of different times, and I think it's very useful data.

As a task force, we need to know about the voters who are voting at vote centers, so we know what are the trends. I think it's also important to look for data that shows how aware is the electorate of the options available to them. This is a significant change in voting model. We've had two presidential elections, but one of those was during a pandemic, and then we also had the unique nature of the statewide recall election. So, I think there's a voter outreach and education component that's really important here. I think it's also important for us to know more about the voters who vote at vote centers. For instance, are these voters unlikely to be voting if we didn't have that option available? Are these voters representing voters who have otherwise been disproportionately underrepresented in voter participation? About voter sentiment, I don't know how many VCA counties do this, but in L.A. County we do a post-election survey, so that we have some data that shows how the voting model contributes to voter confidence or lack of.

**Gabriel Taylor:** To Dean's point, I echo his sentiment. I think it would be helpful to get those added data points, because one of the things that we are interested in is to see the numbers, especially during E-10 to Election Day. Having 11 days is beneficial to voters with disabilities. I agree that it is important to dig deeper to see what is actually happening and the reasons behind it.

**Deanna Kitamura:** Thank you for that presentation and especially for including the drop box information at the vote centers. I don't remember seeing that before, could the slides be shared with us afterwards?

**Dora Rose:** I want to echo Dean and Gabe's comments and thank you for providing the slides. This would be helpful. To be able to dig into the data a little further. I think we were very concerned to make sure that the drop off was included in the data of vote center usage because there is data out there to suggest that it actually doubles the amount of vote centers usage, and we think that people are dropping off their ballots at a staff location for a reason such as needing assistance and they may feel more comfortable handing their ballot to an actual person as opposed to mailing it or putting it in a drop box.

Also, what we've seen is data showing that Black and Latino voters and young people vote in person more than other demographics and they drop off their ballots at vote centers more than other demographics, and those are very long standing trends, and those are underrepresented folks that we really want to engage and we are concerned about doing anything that would limit access for populations that really need access and need early access more broadly.

We are somewhat concerned about the idea of making wholesale changes to the VCA right now. We feel like it's actually quite early in the game. It takes an awful lot of cycles to really perceive changes in voter behavior. It takes a lot of education to let people know what their opportunities are. We are worried that the usage during the pandemic is really anomalous and perhaps not rely on that data. So, for all those reasons we are interested in digging more into the data. We're also worried about just taking the data at face value. We need to understand more about who's actually being impacted. We may see changes at the federal level that really drive us more into in-person voting whether we want to or not. There is also volatility at USPS. So, we need to be careful about making changes. Those are just some of the things we're thinking about.

**Jesse Salinas:** I loved looking through the data and appreciate that you shared it because it allows us to dig deeper and learn more. Dora, to your point about the USPS, the issue is real. It's an issue that is happening at the federal level. I think that obviously, we're going to do things that we think are best here in California. So that's part of why this group is together, right? To discuss all these items and have a good discussion and come up with well-balanced solutions. This is going to be some hard work, but we'll get through these discussions and have productive conversations moving forward.

## **9. Future Agenda Items:**

- Work Groups
- Committees
- Recent Research Reports

## **Public Comments:**



**Brian Bertacini:** From San Jose, Santa Clara County. La Kenya, thank you very much for hosting this meeting and allowing for public comments. I am looking forward to the work of this task force. There is one theme that I hear a lot, we are still not meeting the voter turnout that we are targeting, right? In San Jose, we have 10 city council districts, and we have a couple of districts where there's historically low turnout. While doing some homework, it seems that the demographic has a lack of trust in government, right? Maybe they come from other countries, or they don't believe in the vote. Maybe they see things here such as public corruption, whatever and they are checked out and not participating. It's problematic.

Another problem is that there is no shortage of conspiracy theories up and down the chain. There is one thing that we see when it comes to the vote county and the ballot filtering. You have certain counties that will look at a ballot and if they are going through adjudication, it increases the time it takes to do the ballot counting. I think the longer it takes to process these votes there is an erosion of public trust when that happens and I would like to see consistency within the state on ballot filtering. For example, here in Santa Clara County, and I want to say that we have an awesome registrar of voters, Matt Morales has done a great job during the period that he has been in that role and he is trusted by his team. If you go to San Bernardino County, they have a different process. They don't adjudicate under votes, so they may have their election results a lot quicker.

**Jugh De Pentheny O'Kelly:** Thank you for having me on and allowing us to join your meeting. I'm with Sonoma County's GOP Election Integrity Committee. On the topic of erosion of confidence in the election system, the one issue I would like to address is the use of voting machines that are provided to disabled voters. I think that's wonderful that we have them and we are facilitating for the disabled. It would be nice to see that those machines are only used by the disabled and not by the general public. Also making voting more accessible for everyone in the state, voter rolls being kept up to date. It is very undermining to find out after elections that oh, by the way, the voter rolls weren't exactly up to date. One other thing I would like to address is the amount of time that it's taking California to bring its number together after election day. The rest of the country is looking at California and asking what is happening? I really do think that this needs to be addressed. By not having election results timely, people will lose trust in the system.

**Alice Kao:** Thank you for putting this public meeting together and allowing us to have a public comment. I like to echo what Brian Bertacini talked about, the inconsistency in the adjudication process. This is a problem in Santa Clara County where the adjudication rate is between 35% and 50%. When one out of two ballots need to be handled by humans to review it, then why do we have machines? There is something very wrong about that and people don't feel confident about what is being done. I think your numbers of voters dropping off their ballot via Vote-by-Mail might be very skewed. Most people didn't know about this election code that allowed them to vote in person, but bring their Vote-by-Mail to a vote center to either drop it off or scan it themselves, and we have observed that many vote centers, especially in VCA counties resists allowing people to know that.

**Alice Smith:** Thank you. I'm Alice Smith from the National Voter Corps. For the people that are here from the Legislature, the Senate and the Assembly advisors, please make sure that there's enough money in the budget to implement the Save Act much like the states that already have implemented the Save Act. Many people from California now live in New Hampshire or Idaho, or places where they are requiring birth certificates and other documents such as change of gender and other information. I also think that you should look at how to get everyone who is unregistered in California to register. These are my comments and for now thank you so much for this very interesting meeting.

**Xi GAO:** I am from Santa Clara County. I am a voter and election observer. My first comment is on voter education, specifically as it relates to in-person voting. It's very confusing when voters come into the Elections office to vote. I witnessed people coming into the office to vote but left with just dropping their ballot in the envelope and dropped it and that is not in-person voting. So, I think voter education is important to let people know what is and isn't in-person voting.

**Rhonda Provost:** I'm Rhonda Provost from Sonoma County. We're blessed to have the team we have in Sonoma County. There are so many factors affecting election integrity today. I want people to safeguard the sacred life of my ballot through the course of an election. My concern is what is happening to that ballot in the course of an election. keeping that ballot safe through this election process. There are good people paired with bad systems that produce bad outcomes. I would encourage people to listen to interviews with Harry Howy who helped design the system in Sonoma County.

10. Meeting Adjourned