

# Office of the Registrar of Voters

## “Vote to Save”

### Issue

Should the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors support legislation to change state law to allow each county, at its option, to vote solely by mail?

### Method

During the most recent general election Grand Jury members visited more than 100 polling precincts (representing nearly 20 percent of the total number), submitted comments and recommendations to the Registrar and her staff, observed the processing of ballots on election night, and critiqued the findings and recommendations with the Registrar’s Office. The Grand Jury discussed with the Registrar the cost of the election. The cost of “voting by mail” (VBM) was compared to the conventional vote-in-person procedure.

### Background

In the November 2008 election 44.2% of the registered voters in Sacramento County chose to vote by mail as opposed to going to the polls. Of the 58 counties in California, 55 had more than 40% of their voters cast their ballots by mail. Two of the least populated counties, Alpine and Mariposa, voted entirely by mail.

The costs for statewide and national elections, June primary and November general elections, are borne by the counties, with cities, school districts and special districts paying a share depending on the number of their items on the ballot. If the Legislature and the Governor so decide, special statewide elections are paid for by the state; otherwise, the elections are conducted solely at county expense.

The total cost to Sacramento County in the November 2008 election was approximately \$3.5 million.

| Cost Item                              | Mail and Precinct Voting | Vote by Mail Exclusively |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fixed Costs (staff pay and benefits)   | \$1.5 million            | \$2.0 million            |
| Fixed Costs (maintenance of equipment) | 0.5 million              |                          |
| Precinct Costs                         | 1.5 million              |                          |
| Mail Costs (VBM only)                  |                          | 0.5 million              |
| Total:                                 | \$3.5 million            | \$2.5 million            |

As illustrated in the table above, if Sacramento County were to change to VBM, it could save \$1,000,000 per election.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding:** Currently, California law does not give discretion to counties to conduct elections exclusively by mail. Given the authority to conduct elections entirely by mail, the County of Sacramento could save approximately \$1,000,000 per election. In these stringent budget times, that is a substantial saving.

**Recommendation:** That the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors should pursue legislation giving the County the option to conduct future elections solely by mail.

### **Response Requirements**

**Penal Code sections 933 and 933.5 require that specific responses to both the findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Sacramento Superior Court by October 1, 2009 from:**

- **Sacramento Board of Supervisors**