January 9, 2020

RE: Recommendations for the New Los Angeles Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) System for the March 3, 2020 General Municipal Election

Dear Mr. Logan,

On behalf of the California Contract Cities Association, we write to express our concerns regarding the new Los Angeles Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) System. Specifically, we are deeply concerned the current system may create confusion and misunderstanding when more than four candidates are qualified for a given race. Since the trial release of VSAP, several of our member cities have pointed to the various notification “buttons” available to voters which may be confusing to voters and could result in some candidates being skipped over by voters before moving to the next election contest. After a careful review of the system and comments received from our members, we strongly believe VSAP lacks sufficient visual aids, prompts, or notifications to inform voters that other qualified candidates are available for selection. This is in direct conflict with VSAP’s principle goal to not create a “barrier [or] source of disenfranchisement for any group of voters.” We feel there is a substantial probability that some candidates will be overlooked or inadvertently skipped over with the current ballot format.

In the 2018 General Election, the city of Cudahy had a total of 9 candidates for three seats on the city council. The margin of victory that separated the third seat between the third and fourth vote top-getter was 58 votes. A similar scenario also occurred in the city of Montebello, where ten candidates ran for three seats on the city council. Three votes separated the third and fourth vote top-getter, while approximately 50 votes separated the first, second, and third vote top-getter. These two election contests represent potential case studies where the decision and intuition of a voter to select their preferred qualified candidates could result in vastly different outcomes. If VSAP were to be implemented without proper visuals and aids, it would raise serious concerns regarding the validity of votes cast and furthering concerns an election could be contested.

If the new VSAP system would have been used in the 2018 General Election, other cities with more than four qualified candidates would be at risk: Agoura Hills, Artesia, Baldwin Park, Bell Gardens, Carson, Claremont, Diamond Bar, El Monte, Hawaiian Gardens, Inglewood, Lynwood, Malibu, Maywood, Pico Rivera, San Fernando, Santa Clarita, Santa Fe Springs, Santa Monica, and West Covina. We can expect these issues to not only arise in 2020 but also impact other election contests, including the Presidential Primary.
The importance of providing clear voting instructions and intuitive features that can accessibly inform a voter to properly utilize VSAP is especially critical this election cycle. This year, voters will have to go to a new voting center, while also casting their ballots in a new state-of-the-art electronic platform. We are sure this change will create many challenges for the Registrar-Recorder, but also for many municipal city clerks.

While VSAP has received positive feedback from voters during its trial tests, the system has not used actual candidate names to test the reliability of VSAP’s selection process. In the event a seat is contested for these reasons, it would be necessary for the Registrar-Recorder to enact improvements to the system. However, we cannot allow the 2020 General Election to simply be a trial run to determine what improvements are needed for future elections.

CCCA strongly urges the Registrar-Recorder work to address this issue, whether it be to require that voters view all candidates before casting their vote for the next office, which is our primary recommendation, or randomize the order of all candidates in each ballot. These proposed changes are imperative to secure the integrity of ballots cast and protect the validity of votes in Los Angeles County.

Should you have any questions regarding our concerns, please contact Marcel Rodarte at Marcel@contractcities.org or (562) 622-5533.

Sincerely,

Sandra Armenta, City of Rosemead
President,
California Contract Cities Association

Gustavo Camacho, City of Pico Rivera
Legislative Chair,
California Contract Cities Association

CC:
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Los Angeles County Cities
Alex Padilla, California Secretary of State