

## OVERVIEW

The purpose of this Joint Oversight Hearing is to explore whether the way in which the state of Colorado now conducts its elections is a feasible and appropriate model for implementation in California as a response to our historically low voter turnout during the 2014 Primary and General Elections.

According to the Secretary of State, only 25.17% of all registered California voters cast a ballot in the June 3, 2014 Primary Election and only 42.20% cast a ballot in the November 4, 2014 General Election. Since 1960, turnout of registered voters in California non-presidential General Elections has steadily decreased from a high of 79.2% in 1966 to a previous low of 50.57% in 2002. Turnout for non-presidential Primary Elections since 1960 has also steadily decreased from a high of 68.88% in 1978 (when Proposition 13 appeared on the ballot) to a previous low of 33.31% in 2010.

On average, voter turnout was poor across the entire country in 2014. According to a study by the organization Nonprofit VOTE (included in the hearing background materials), last year fewer than 37% of all eligible voters nationwide turned out to vote, the lowest level of voter turnout seen in a non-presidential election year since World War II. However, the study also points out that California ranked a disappointing 43<sup>rd</sup> in turnout of eligible voters last November among the 50 states and District of Columbia at a mere 30.8%. Please note that these national figures represent *eligible voters* (all persons who are qualified to vote, whether registered or not) as opposed to actual *registered voters*, as referenced in the preceding paragraph.

By contrast, Colorado ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> nationally for the same election. Much of Colorado's success has been attributed to meaningful changes in how they now conduct elections, including automatically sending every voter a vote-by-mail ballot, providing numerous ballot drop-off sites, and replacing precinct-based polling places with centrally-located voting centers that are open every day for 10 to 14 days prior to each election.

The essence of the Colorado system (see description below) is that voters may choose to vote at home using their mail ballot or visit any of the several vote centers within their home county at their convenience, whether that is on election day itself or any of the days leading up to it, including weekends.

### Colorado Election System Highlights

1. Each voter is mailed a vote by mail ballot.
2. Voters may mail the voted ballot back to elections officials or return it in person to the official's office, a vote center, or a designated drop-off location (most Colorado ballots were dropped off in person in 2014).

3. Instead of traditional neighborhood polling places, Colorado provides vote centers which are open 8 to 14 days prior to Election Day depending on the type of election.
4. Within each jurisdiction one vote center is provided for every 30,000 voters with minimum numbers required for smaller jurisdictions.
5. Vote centers provide all of the following:
  - Voter registration and voting through Election Day.
  - In-person voting for anyone who lost their ballot or needs a new ballot for any other reason.
  - Accessible voting machines for disabled voters.
  - Ballot on demand printing systems.
  - Electronic poll books that interact with the statewide voter database.

### Hearing Testimony

Secretary of State Alex Padilla, several California elections officials, and representatives from California voter interest groups traveled to Colorado to observe the May 5, 2015 Denver municipal election which was conducted using the aforementioned system. Secretary of State Padilla as well as some of the other observers will testify today regarding their assessment of that system and whether the system or aspects thereof, could or should be implemented in California.

Other California elections officials who have already used, or plan to use, specific aspects of the Colorado system (e.g., ballot on demand printers, electronic poll books, all mail balloting) will also testify today regarding their experiences.