

MONTEREY COUNTY



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April 14, 2020

Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Resolution requesting a State Executive Order to conduct the November Election by mail

Dear Governor Newsom:

We the Board of Supervisors for the County of Monterey have issued the enclosed resolution recommending immediate action by Executive Order to conduct the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election entirely by mail.

Monterey County and the State of California are under a state of emergency due to COVID-19 for an indefinite period. During this time, citizens have been ordered by both the County and the State to shelter in place (SIP) and to only venture in public for essential tasks related to necessities: food, medicine, and health. The SIP is inconsistent with a significant part of California's voting model, which requires polling places for in-person voting and poses significant risks to the health and safety of citizens, voters, volunteers, and staff.

Many of our polling place managers and poll workers have indicated that they will not serve in November due to the virus and the state of emergency. As a demographic, our poll workers are older and part of the vulnerable population. In the week leading up to March 3, 2020, approximately 190 poll workers resigned, and others expressed significant concern about COVID-19. Medical experts indicate that it is likely that the virus will remain active or re-emerge this fall during the election season posing a persistent risk to citizens.

Under your direction, California has led the country in enacting public health and safety standards to help deter the spread of the virus. It is time once again to lead the country. California Elections Code provides for voting by mail as an alternative to in-person voting. In fact, 80% of Monterey County voters received a ballot by mail in the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election. Expansion of vote by mail for November to include all voters would provide all voters the opportunity to vote without violating shelter in place orders while eliminating the unnecessary risk of spreading COVID-19 through our community. In recognition of this, your office has already issued an Executive Order authorizing 100% vote by mail for several special vacancy elections in the state this spring:

"The respective county elections officials responsible for conducting each respective election shall transmit vote-by-mail ballots to all voters eligible to vote in each respective election. Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Order, elections officials are also authorized, and encouraged, to make in-person voting opportunities available on or before Election Day for each of these elections in a manner consistent with public health and safety, to maximize voter accessibility."

*Re: Resolution requesting a State Executive Order
to conduct the November Election by mail*

A similar declaration for the November Election would eliminate uncertainty and provide election officials the ability to plan and prepare for the election in a manner that would safeguard the public and give county officials the flexibility to offer in-person voting opportunities as the situation and guidelines permit leading up to the election.

The April 7, 2020 primary election in Wisconsin put voters at risk and late changes made it impossible for election officials to prepare. Due to extenuating circumstances related to COVID-19, Milwaukee reduced 180 polling locations to 5 and staffed the locations with members of the National Guard. This illustrates the type of situation that can be avoided by an early Executive Order.

The Monterey County Elections Department has been planning the November 2020 election since mid-2019. The Department recently completed an upgrade to a new voting system and acquired a mail ballot processing system. With these changes, the Department is well positioned to absorb the increased volume of ballots in an all-mail scenario, which could be up to 100,000 additional ballots.

Without direction, the Department would have to prepare for multiple scenarios and attempt to recruit double the number of poll workers, procure alternative locations in contract to account for loss of polling locations, and attempt to purchase a sufficient quantity of personal protective equipment and disinfectant supplies to safeguard up to 1,000 workers at locations across the County.

While political parties, legislatures, courts, advocates of all types, interest groups, academics, state and federal officials, and media are all offering advice for a solution to the November election, missing from the discussion are the voices of county elected boards and election officials who administer and finance the election and who are held accountable for the election's success or failure.

There is a parallel to the federal, state and local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus raged while federal decision makers, along with the media and other interests, discussed and deferred concrete actions. It was your leadership in concert with bay area counties, including Monterey County, that took early, bold and decisive action to mitigate the pandemic. The wisdom and foresight of those decisions is now being recognized and emulated.

We encourage you to issue an Executive Order substantively the same as the March 20, 2020 Order directing the election to be conducted by mail. We understand other County Boards of Supervisors will be considering the same recommendation in future meetings. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris M. Lopez
Chair, Board of Supervisors

Attachments: Monterey County Resolution (4/14/20)

cc: Hon. Alex Padilla, Secretary of State
Hon. Bill Monning, 17th Senate District
Hon. Anna Caballero, 12th Senate District
Hon. Mark Stone, 29th Assembly District
Hon. Robert Rivas, 30th Assembly District

California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)
California Association of Clerks and Election Officials
(CACEO)