



# Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D. California Secretary of State Elections Division

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## Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC)

Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

### Meeting Minutes

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

VAAC members present:

- Fred Nisen
- Veronica Elsea
- Mary Helen Gallegos
- Roxana Castro
- Aaron Nevarez
- Mat Ptacek
- Mike Nguyen
- Rebecca Donabed

Members of SOS:

- Shirley N. Weber – Secretary of State
- Debra Ledsinger – OVSTA

Members of the Public:

- Victoria Post

Quorum was met.

#### 2. New Committee Members Swearing-In

- Secretary of State Dr. Shirley N. Weber was present to swear the new committee members in. She spoke about the importance of the VAAC and the work they do to improve California elections for disabled voters.
- The members of the VAAC were sworn-in by the Secretary.

#### 3. Co-Chair Nominations

- Prior to the nominating and election of co-chairs, members were asked to offer a brief introduction about themselves for the VAAC.
  - Fred Nisen – Managing attorney for voting rights with Disability Rights CA, also has served as co-chair of the state VAAC for the past six years. This is his fourth term on the VAAC.

- Veronica Elsea – Santa Cruz resident and member of local VAAC for twelve years. This will be her second term on the VAAC after serving as co-chair last term.
- Mary Helen Gallegos – Representative from Monterey County Registrar of Voters (ROV) with four years working on the local VAAC, as well as experience with the state VAAC.
- Roxana Castro – Ten years working in elections for two different counties, currently serving with the Orange County ROV as a Community Program Specialist.
- Aaron Nevarez – Assistant Registrar Recorder County Clerk for Los Angeles County. Oversees their Election Operations and Logistics Bureau. Apart of LA County’s LAAC and VAAC committees.
- Mat Ptacek – Representative from the San Luis Obispo ROV, specializing in polling place selection and poll worker training and oversight.
- Mike Nguyen – Student at UC Berkeley, has served with on the Santa Clara County VAAC, Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC), and the VOC (Voter Outreach Committee).
- Rebecca Donabed – Community organizer for Resources for Independence Central Valley, member of three local VAACs (Tulare, Fresno, and Merced), chair of the Tulare VAAC. Also has experience training poll workers in assisting disabled voters.
- Following introductions, Ryan asked for nominations for a VAAC chair.
- Fred nominated himself, which was seconded by Aaron.
- Veronica nominated herself, which was seconded by Mary Helen.

**Motion:** To elect Fred Nisen and Veronica Elsea to serve as co-chairs for the current VAAC term.

- The vote was 8-0 in favor.

#### 4. Committee Goals

- Increasing the number of pre-registered voters in youth demographic.
- Explore how to expand voter accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing community.
- Continuing to research the petition process to expand accessibility for voters with disabilities.
- Streamlining Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail (RAVBM) process and create documents explaining how to interact with voters with disabilities.
- Researching how to render RAVBM more accessible for visually impaired voters.
- Researching ways to make the Safe at Home program more accessible for voters with disabilities.

- Explore outreach efforts to inform the general public of the VAAC to gather feedback/input. Work with other local VAACs.
- AB 545 (Ch 658, Statutes of 2023) - ask for feedback from the counties on how curbside voting went in the recent election.
- Identify opportunities for the VAAC to increase voter turnout among voters with disabilities.
- Review how counties select vote centers; encourage counties to make sure all vote centers and polling places are accessible to all voters.
- Increasing participation within the local VAACs.
- Assist San Luis Obispo County on developing a local VAAC.
- Build relationships with local accessibility organizations to understand barriers that voters with disabilities face and research potential solutions to remove those barriers and increase turnout.
- Issue a survey to learn about the experiences of disabled voters during the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary Election.

## 5. Public Comments and Future Agenda Items

- Victoria Post asked if the VAAC might be willing to look at outreach opportunities to engage with the general population of disabled voters, rather than keeping outreach efforts narrowed on individuals who are already engaged with a local disability organization.
- Veronica would like the VAAC to look at the different issues, working groups, and recommendations that the VAAC had made during the previous term, to see which activities should be taken up during the new term.
- Debra Ledsinger from SOS's Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment (OVSTA) made a request for volunteers to assist in the testing of a Dominion RAVBM system, which will be held in the SOS building from April 24 to April 26. Those who are interested can email Debra at [votingsystems@sos.ca.gov](mailto:votingsystems@sos.ca.gov).
- Liz Oviedo from the Santa Cruz ROV mentioned that the county had their first voters with disabilities workshop, and it was successful. They also had members of the local VAAC involved with the county during the March 5 Primary.

## 6. Adjournment