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Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC)

Wednesday, May 22, 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:

- Debra Ledsinger – Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment (OVSTA)
- Robert Ullrey – Voter's Choice Act (VCA)
- Mary Mooney – Attorney

Quorum was met.

2. VAAC Members Community Outreach Updates

- Fred Nisen
 - Disability Rights CA has recently collected reports of various accessibility issues from voters that need to be addressed before the November General Election.
 - Disability Rights CA has been conducting outreach with blind and low-vision voters who are facing accessibility issues.
- Veronica Elsea
 - No updates.
- Aaron Nevarez
 - Last month, LA Elections hosted a joint committee meeting between their local LAAC (Language Accessibility Advisory Committee), VAAC, and its Community Voter Outreach Committee, to coordinate their efforts.

- They are planning regular quarterly meetings for the separate committees going forward.
- Mary Helen Gallegos
 - Preparing for the June 4 Special Election.
 - Recently participated in Language Day, an event that assists in outreach and networking.
- Mat Ptacek
 - No updates
- Mike Nguyen
 - The local VAAC and LAAC in Santa Clara will be starting their meetings in the summer.
- Rebecca Donabed
 - The May Tulare County VAAC meeting was postponed until July.
 - The Kings County VAAC held an open house in February.
 - Rebecca also reported on voting statistics for her region during the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary.
- Roxana Castro
 - The Orange County VAAC held a meeting in April with attendance from college students who are working on accessibility issues.
 - They are concluding their outreach program for accessibility solutions and are planning a one-day outreach event to be held soon.

3. Secretary of State

Voting Systems Testing

- Debra Ledsinger from SOS updated the VAAC on recent testing of voting systems.
 - Dominion Democracy Suite 5.19 Voting System and RAVBM (Remote Access Vote-by-Mail) is in the testing process. This is for a full certification, which will require accessibility testing. LAAC will be invited to observe the test when it has been scheduled.
 - Hart Intercivic Verity Voting 3.2 Ranked Choice Tab Voting has been approved.
 - Democracy Live Secure Select 1.1.5 withdrew their application.
 - Hart Intercivic Verity 3.2.1 is in the testing process.
 - ES&S 6.3.0.2 Voting System is in an application review.
 - Tenex E-Pollbook System has administrative approval and is in the application review process.
- Veronica asked if administrative approval is a part of the standard testing and approval process. Debra answered that administrative approval is a different process apart from the normal testing process for full certification, but still results in a certification for use in elections.

- Debra encouraged VAAC members to reach out to her with any questions at votingsystems@sos.ca.gov.

Voter's Choice Act (VCA)

- Robert Ullrey from SOS updated the VAAC on recent VCA news.
- The VCA team is currently preparing for the upcoming November General Election.
- Veronica asked Robert about the lack of voting services (specifically vote centers and drop boxes) in her area of Santa Cruz County and if the VCA team is aware of this issue. Robert said that county Election Administration Plans (EAPs) are being reviewed right now (including Santa Cruz County) and that is one of the issues that will be scrutinized.

Legislation

- Mary Mooney from SOS updated the VAAC on recent legislation in the CA Legislature.
- SB 1450 would re-establish the VCA task force which expired in 2022. This task force would report on elections and require vote centers to post notices on the availability of alternative language services. This bill will also include dates for when the LAAC, VAAC, and the Voter Education Outreach Advisory Committee must hold their first meeting. The bill has been approved by the Senate and is currently in the Assembly.
- AB 2627 would create the Civic Learning Outreach and Engagement Fund that would require SOS to award grants to organizations that promote voter registration and civic engagement. This bill is currently in the Appropriations committee of the Assembly and the Secretary has issued a letter of support for it.

4. VAAC Purpose and Responsibilities

- Ryan briefly conducted an overview of the VAAC's Purpose and Responsibilities for new members.
- As a committee under the Secretary of State, the Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for making recommendations for improving access to voting and election materials. The VAAC is designed to advise, assist, and provide recommendations to the Secretary of State's office as to how voters with disabilities can vote independently and privately.
- Ryan will also be sending out some documents, including information about the Bagley-Keane act, which regulates public meetings. Ryan encouraged members to acquaint themselves with the information that will be provided.

5. Working Groups

Updates from 2022/2023 term.

- Remote Accessible Vote by Mail FAQs.
 - The working group found out late in the last term that there is another document, produced by California Association of Clerks and Election Officials (CACEO), which also provides FAQs on this subject. There is a possibility that the documents will be merged once the CACEO FAQs have been reviewed.
 - Aaron, who sits on the CACEO committee, mentioned that he would be available to facilitate engagement between the committee and the VAAC working group, but he would like to review the working group's FAQs when possible. Ryan will be sharing the document with VAAC members.
- Recording Political Party Statements of Purpose in American Sign Language (ASL).
 - SOS is working on this internally and will be reaching out to the political parties to make sure their written statement is in the format they still want it in prior to making the recordings.
 - Veronica asked if the ASL recordings will be on the SOS website or the websites of the political parties. Ryan confirmed that it will only be posted on the SOS website.
- Disability Sensitivity at the Polls
 - This informational document from the working group was sent out to the counties as a CCROV and then print-outs were sent to the counties to give to their poll workers. It was also posted on the SOS website.
- Making Participation in the Petition Process Accessible to Voters with Disabilities
 - The SOS Initiatives Coordinator answered questions that were posed to SOS by the subcommittee and these answers are now available on the VAAC website.
 - Veronica asked if SOS could send the answers directly to the VACC working group so that they can review the document, and she asked that responses from SOS to VAAC working groups be sent to them prior to being published or posted on the website. Ryan responded that he sent an email the previous day with the document attached. Kirsten Larsen also answered that the document was posted on the website specifically because this was an agenized item and it needed to be available to the public.
- County Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee Toolkit
 - This document was completed last term and was recommended to SOS, which posted it on the VAAC web page.

New working groups for the 2024/2025 term.

- Working Group: to work on outreach to voters with disabilities in all counties.
 - Veronica suggested creating a working group for understanding the merits and issues of VCA vote centers in their service of voters with disabilities. She clarified that some voters with disabilities struggle with the vote centers for a variety of reasons that are not present in traditional polling places, and she would like to collect information from voters, SOS, and the counties about vote centers and their accessibility issues.
 - Mary Helen recommended an approach that would encourage counties to reach out to their voters to discover what their specific needs are, particularly regarding vote centers.
 - With Mary Helen's recommendation in mind, Veronica advocated for a working group that can overview general outreach solutions and approaches that counties can use for engaging voters with disabilities.
 - Veronica brought forward a motion, which was seconded by Mary Helen.

Motion: To establish a working group focusing on outreach to voters with disabilities.

- The motion passed, 8-0.
 - Kirsten Larsen made a comment that the subcommittee's intentions may be the same as the VAAC's overall intentions, which might make the working group redundant. Veronica replied that time is scarce in the main VAAC meeting and that a subcommittee allows for specific issues to be given the proper amount of discussion.
 - The new subcommittee will be made up of Veronica, Mary Helen, and Roxana.
- Working Group: look at curbside voting and gather feedback from the disability community and provide recommendations to counties.
 - Aaron brought up the use of curb-side voting and he would like there to be discussions about how counties provide this service and if there can be any improvements that the VAAC can advise on.
 - Aaron proposed a motion, which was seconded by Veronica.

Motion: To establish a working group focusing on curb-side voting.

- The motion passed, 8-0.
 - The new subcommittee will be made up of Aaron, Mary Helen, and Fred.
- Working Group: to focus on accessibility with creating, circulating, and signing petitions and referendums.

- Veronica would like to revive the Making Participation in the Petition Process Available to Voters with Disabilities working group from last year.
- Veronica brought forward a motion, which was seconded by Mike.

Motion: To establish a working group focusing on the accessibility of creating, circulating, and signing petitions and referenda.

- The motion passed, 8-0.
 - The new subcommittee will be made up of Veronica, Mike, and Rebecca.
- Working Group: to review the previous RAVBM FAQ document that the 2022-2023 VAAC sent to the SOS with recommendations and potentially merging it with the Voters with Specific Needs RAVBM document.
 - Veronica asked about the merger of the two existing Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail FAQs (one from the VAAC and the other from CACEO). She asked the VAAC if they should re-establish the working group to focus on merging the documents.
 - Veronica brought forward a motion, seconded by Rebecca.

Motion: To establish a working group to provide recommendations on the potential merging of the Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail FAQs with the document created by CACEO's Voters with Specific Needs Committee.

- The motion passed, 8-0.
- The subcommittee will be made up of Veronica, Fred, and Rebecca.

6. Public Comments and Future Agenda Items

- The co-chairs agreed to table the agenda item to collect the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary Election Feedback to the next VAAC meeting on July 17th.
- Veronica asked that SOS provide more information on the Safe at Home program to see if they are able to adequately provide confidentiality services to voters with disabilities. This information has been inquired about by local community members who have spoken to Veronica. Ryan replied that Elections is holding regular meetings with Safe at Home and will provide any updates to the VAAC. This will also be an agenda item for the next meeting.
- There were no public comments or other future agenda items.

7. Adjournment