



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

1500 11th Street, 5th Floor | Sacramento, CA 95814 | 916.657.2166 | elections@sos.ca.gov

## Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC)

Wednesday, September 11, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

### Meeting Minutes

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

LAAC members present:

- Janet Bernabe
- Paul Burke
- Jacqueline Coto
- Pedro Hernandez
- Deanna Kitamura
- Alexander Neofitidis
- Karduz Nguyen (left at 1:45 p.m.)
- Armando Salud-Ambriz
- Voleck Taking
- Abril Villanueva
- Monica Villicana
- Barbara Hurtado

Members of SOS:

- Jana Lean – Chief of Elections
- Justin Hirai – Election Security Unit Manager
- Debra Ledsinger – IT Specialist - Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment (OVSTA)
- Robert Ullrey – Assistant Deputy Secretary of State - Policy, Planning and Voter's Choice Act (VCA)
- Lexi Howard – Legislation

Quorum was met.

#### 2. LAAC Member Updates

- Pedro Hernandez
  - California Common Cause is preparing to engage in the election protection program with Asian Law Caucus. They will be partaking in election observation in Southern California to make sure that polling locations have all the necessary accessibility materials that they should have (Ex: language materials, magnifying glasses) and looking forward to noting areas of improvement from that were found during the Primary Election. He also met with the Latino Coalition of San Benito County last weekend on areas to help improve their language access

in the county. He also reached out to Santa Cruz regarding some language content but did not get much information. He was looking to get more from them regarding their language access.

- Pedro also shared that Calvin will be resigning from her position with the LAAC due to time constraints at his job.
- Abril Villaneuva
  - Has been doing a lot of community engagement events as part of Rising Communities. She has been a part of the English and Spanish candidate forums on informing voter son the candidates that will be in the General Election. Through her recent community engagement events, she realized that there is a lot of misinformation that is happening with minority groups because there is not information being translated in a language in which they can understand. She is looking forward to the recommendations that they discussed to be implemented.
- Alexander Neofitidis
  - No updates.
- Armando Salud-Ambriz
  - It has been a universal phenomenon that counties are struggling to recruit poll workers for this election. He mentioned that Yolo County only needs 19 poll worker positions filled, and he does not foresee that being an issue. Armando stated he does not have the percentage of foreign language poll workers that were hired in Yolo County. They contract through a staffing company to hire the language needs for their poll workers, but he said he would work on those statistics and bring that information back to LAAC to share.
- Deanna Kitamura
  - Deanna has been working on the legislative bill with Pedro. Her organization has updated the Voter Rights Facts sheet. They are in the process of translating them into various languages. They are a few that are already translated into 10 languages and will post them on their website soon. They are starting to reach out to their community partners now to set up workshops with those community groups for August and September. They are finishing the report from their March Poll Monitoring with Common Cause and should be out sometime next month.
- Jacqueline Coto
  - Jacqueline has been working hard coordinating with the bilingual poll worker working group. The working group met last week, and they went over some of the questions on the survey and proposed some edits and suggestions.

## Janet Bernabe

- The efforts for the Riverside County Elections office have been more of outreach and educational. They increased civic engagement non-partisan in their region. She also does non-profit and works on bringing translators/translation equipment to local candidate forums that are taking place to help those who may need. She is also part of LULAC of Riverside and helps in educating the community on voting.
- Karduz Nguyen
  - Left meeting at 1:45 p.m., No updates.
- Monica Villicana
  - Monica spoke with her colleagues at Santa Clara County regarding ASL vendors and incorporating these more into poll locations. For SCC they reached out to ASL vendors that are contracted through their county and this was Hanna. They are looking into the budget and training on use of this if they were to implement Hanna in SCC voting centers. They provided her with a certificate that stated that they are certified by the State to provide ASL services. She wanted to know if Hanna has been certified through the State and if their application and sites were able to be implemented. She will be emailing Ryan, Victoria, and Alexander questions that SCC has regarding ASL vendors.
- Barbara Hurtado
  - Barbara will not be able to stay the whole meeting. Event for Spanish speaking voters, the SLO county elections office has 6 events through Latino Voter Involvement Project which is put together by local students from Cal Poly SLO. She helps to inform them on their voter information guide, ballots, and how they translate those materials and the resources that they have to offer them.
- Paul Burke
  - Paul attended the Ventura County LAAC/VAAC meeting. He was hoping to get some ideas from people on how to get more individuals to partake in these meetings. Registration form asks if they would like materials sent to them in another language and was wondering if other counties wrote to such people and invited them to the LAAC. He knows that some counties go through civic organizations, but he was hoping for other ways.
    - Pedro mentioned that several LAAC members updated the County LAAC toolkit last year and that there are recommendations in there on efforts that other counties have done to recruit/bring members to participate in the LAAC.
- Voleck Taking
  - No updates.

### 3. Working Groups

- Poll Worker Research
  - No Update.
- Translation Timeline, Feedback, and Recommendations
  - They wanted to look at translations timelines and process is for the VIG.
  - Pedro thought BLTS engagement with SOS and translations was impressive.
  - They have more long-term recommendations regarding this subject.
- Language Accessibility Best Practices and Recommendations
  - Discussed short term recommendations more focused around social media.
  - Created a document with 5 short-term recommendations in order of priority with top being more meaningful to not as urgent as the bottom.
  - Mentioned the Life Cycle of the Ballot being translated into other languages because this could be helpful to reinforce the integrity and to combat mis and disinformation about the elections.
  - More interactive social media posts having language access.
  - Jana mentioned sending over videos or testimonials they may have for SOS to look at.
  - Recommendations document to SOS was voted on to send to SOS for review.
  - Will resubmit recommendations minus the 5<sup>th</sup> recommendation of QR code.

### 4. Co-Chair Nomination

- Only one current LAAC member is serving as the Co-Chair since the second one had to drop due to conflicting schedules.
- LAAC Co-Chair, Pedro feels that having two Co-Chairs works better than having one and is opening it up to the LAAC members to run as Co-Chair.
- It was mentioned that being a Co-Chair is a heavy lift and that the idea of having a second Co-Chair is supported by the LAAC.
- Armando was voted on by the LAAC to serve as Co-Chair for the LAAC alongside Pedro.

### 5. Where's my Ballot?

- SOS is broadcasting to organizations and as many people as possible. SOS wants voters to know the status of ballot.
- Service that allows voters to track their vote-by-mail ballot and notifies them of when their ballot was mailed, when it was received, and when it

was counted. These are the top 3 steps of the process that voters tend to want to know and be notified about.

- It also notifies if something goes wrong with the ballot.
- The website is also available in the 9 other languages provided by SOS.
- Ryan shows that it is available in the banners on the home page of SOS website.
- LAAC member, Abril, mentioned their voter registration drives make sure that they also sign up for where's my ballot since they are not automatically registered for that.

## 6. Letter to LAAC Re: Somali and Arabic Language Access

- Back in 2020, the LAAC submitted a letter on behalf of the organizations listed to add Somali and Arabic to the determination list that SOS is required to provide according to section 14201 language requirements.
- SD provides Somali and Arabic facsimile ballots.
- Counties not obligated to provide what goes beyond their federal language requirements.
- There was no response from SOS on this letter and what this request to be responded to.
  - Public Comment: The speaker spoke about language barriers because Somali and Arabic are not being included in the required languages and hinders these communities from coming out and voting.
  - LAAC member mentioned that she thinks members need more time to review the letter and whether they want to recommend this to the SOS.
  - Tabled for next meeting. The Chief of Elections mentioned that the letter was addressed to the previous administration. If they would like to move forward, SOS would require this be addressed to the current administration and be recommended by the current LAAC members.

## 7. Secretary of State Updates

### Voting Systems Testing

- Debra Ledsinger was not available for updates.

### Voter's Choice Act (VCA)

- Robert Ullrey provided updates that VCA is going to be having a SOS Research Symposium on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> that will highlight research and data on California's electorate. They will also be releasing their recent research reports by UCLA and Cal State Sacramento on the following three topics: Examining Political Participation and Access to Politics, Understanding the Experiences of Voters with Disabilities in the 2022 Primary and General Elections in VCA Counties,

Understanding Language Access in the 2022 Primary and General Election,  
And Political Participation by Race and Ethnicity in the 2022 Elections.

- This will be in-person and online. They will send link to those who were signed up for original date and then will send to LAAC members.

#### Legislative Updates

- Lexi Howard provided updates on AB 884 and SB 1450 stating that they are currently on the Governor's desk. SB 1450 would be making changes to the Voter's Choice Act. The Governor has until September 30<sup>th</sup> to act on both the bills.

#### 8. **Public Comments and Future Agenda Items**

- Formation of new working groups.
  - Ex: Language and Geography

#### 9. **Adjournment**