



ELECTION ADMINISTRATION PLAN

California Elections Code

§4005(a)(10)(I)



Melvin E. Levey

Merced County

Registrar of Voters

2222 M Street

Merced, CA 95340

(209) 385-7541

elections@countyofmerced.com

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Section 1 – Election Administration Plan

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Merced County was established on April 19, 1855. The County, named for the river that meanders through its northeastern portion after carving through Yosemite National Park, lies in California's San Joaquin Valley, the agricultural hub of the state. As of the 2020 Decennial Census, the population of the county was 281,202. In September 2023, registered voters numbered 128,149.

The Merced County Registrar of Voters (ROV) is tasked with leading the Merced County Elections (MCE) Department in conducting free, fair, transparent, and secure elections across Merced County. Elections are foundational to the American Experiment and critical to maintaining our democracy and the legitimacy of our government. The MCE professionally administers elections in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and codes. In 2002, state law was amended to allow voters to register as permanent Vote by Mail (VBM). Following that action, the number of VBM voters in Merced County grew steadily. By early 2021, roughly 80% of registered voters in Merced County were registered as permanent VBM. These voters received their ballots via the mail.

In 2016, Senate Bill 450 created the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA), allowing counties to opt into a new voting model. The VCA model provides that every voter receives a Vote by Mail ballot and that Vote Centers (VCs) replace traditional polling locations. The VCA election model was approved by the Merced County Board of Supervisors in March 2021 and was highly effective during the 2022 election cycle. In addition to Merced County, dozens of other counties in California have successfully transitioned to become VCA counties since 2018.

Merced County is now conducting its renewal certification to continue operating as a VCA county. To support that effort, Merced County Elections developed this Election Administration Plan (EAP) in collaboration with community partners, and using lessons learned from experience, as well as guidance from other VCA counties and the California Secretary of State's office. This EAP describes how MCE plans to educate the public regarding the choices that come with the VCA model. It includes information about proposed Vote Center (VCs) and Ballot Drop Box (BDB) locations, and how they will operate. This plan also includes information about the mailing of a ballot to every active registered voter. Further, the plan includes information about the budget and strategy for outreach and media operations, health and safety measures to be taken by MCE, and strategies to engage voters with limited-English proficiency and those with disabilities. The goal of this EAP is to provide information on how the office is planning to administer future elections. Multiple public comment periods and a public hearing allow for input into this plan. Finally, this plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State's (SOS) office for comment. The SOS is responsible for review and approval of the education and outreach portion of the plan. While this plan will be formally approved and adopted in 2023, public feedback and recommendations to this plan and future Merced County Registrar of Voters efforts are welcomed at any time. It is important to note, however, that this EAP is intended to govern Merced County election administration from 2024 through 2027. In accordance with the California Elections Code (EC),

Merced County will conduct its formal process of revising its EAP, as needed, four years from now. That process, including all public meetings, hearings, and comment periods, will occur in 2027.

The Merced County Registrar of Voters (ROV) will deploy the EVS Voting System from Election Systems and Software (ES&S). The deployment will include Election Systems & Software (ES&S) ExpressVote accessible ballot marking devices and the ES&S Balotar Ballot Printing System, among other systems. Merced County will also provide access to the Democracy Live Remote Accessible Vote by Mail System (RAVBM) for those who request an accessible VBM ballot.

VOTE BY MAIL

While originally a provision of the VCA, beginning in 2022, California law mandated that all active registered voters in the state be mailed a ballot 29 days before Election Day. In addition, voters will receive a ballot return envelope with pre-paid postage. In 2024, the official Vote by Mail ballot that Merced County voters receive will come in a newly redesigned envelope that includes orange coloring to make it more visible than in prior years. The return envelope will include bright yellow coloring for the same purpose. Both envelopes were redesigned with input from public focus group research sessions conducted by the Merced County Elections Office. In addition to the updated colors, the return envelope will include a hole punched through the envelope. The punch hole is designed to help visually impaired voters know where to sign their official ballot envelopes, and to help elections officials ensure that each ballot has been extracted from the envelope without inspecting the ballot. This assists in keeping the ballot secret.

Merced County is required to provide all elections material in Spanish as well as English under the provisions of Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. As such, all material mailed to voters and present at our Voting Centers are in both English and Spanish. In addition, Merced County is required under Section 14201 of the California Elections Code to provide translated reference ballots, known as “facsimile” ballots, in four languages (Chinese, Hmong, Mien, and Punjabi). While a facsimile ballot can be sent to any voter upon request, it is important to remember that these ballots are for reference only and are not official ballots. The current list of language requirements in Merced County can be found in Appendix A.

Voters may request a replacement ballot by telephone at (209) 385-7541 or (800) 561-0619; by faxing a request to (209) 385-7387; by sending an email to elections@countyofmerced.com; or by appearing at a Merced County Vote Center or at the Merced County Elections Office located at 2222 M St, 1st Floor, Merced, CA 95340. In the case of a voter needing someone else to pick up a replacement ballot on their behalf, the voter must fill out a form called “[Application to Provide Vote by Mail Ballot to Representative](#).” The form is located on the California Secretary of State’s “Vote by Mail” webpage and is also available from the Merced County Elections Office. The form gives another person permission to pick up the replacement ballot on behalf of another voter. That person must bring the completed form in person to a Merced County elections official in order to get the voter’s ballot.

Voters who need or prefer to read and mark their Vote by Mail ballot electronically may be able to use the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) system. For more information about the RAVBM system, see the “Ensuring Access to VBM and Voting Locations” section below.

Merced County will make available, “Where’s My Ballot?”, also known as BallotTrax, a ballot tracking program that will allow voters to receive updates on the delivery status of their ballot as

it progresses through the mail and through processing by the Merced County Elections Office. Voters can sign up for this at the website (<https://california.ballottrax.net/voter/>) or by using the QR code we have printed on both the Official Ballot envelope mailed to each voter and the return envelope that voters will mail back to the Elections Office with their ballot sealed inside. Voters are also able to contact the Merced County Elections Office for help in signing up for BallotTrax should they not have access to internet service themselves. Voters who sign up can receive automatic emails, SMS (text), or voice call notification about their ballot. Tracking their ballot when it is mailed, received, and counted has never been easier. Where's My Ballot? is a secure software application that locates ballot envelopes. The system works with elections officials and the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to send voter messages when their ballot is received. To increase transparency for the entire VBM process, Merced County will be using Intelligent Mail barcodes (IMb). This is a 65-bar USPS barcode that is used to sort and track mail. It can be used to track individual mail pieces through their journey in the mail system. The IMb is printed on the envelope and helps ensure that the mailings make it to mailboxes. IMb provides higher levels of customer service while enhancing security.

VOTE CENTER AND BALLOT DROP BOX LOCATION CONSIDERATIONS

The Voter's Choice Act establishes criteria and formulas for the number, placement, and locations of Vote Centers (VC) and Ballot Drop Boxes (BDB). VC and/or BDB locations are subject to change, based on the availability of the location host. The locations are chosen based on specific considerations and requirements described below:

- Proximity to, and availability of, public transportation
- Proximity to communities with historically low Vote by Mail usage
- Proximity to population centers
- Proximity to low-income communities
- Proximity to language minority communities (consisting of individuals whose primary or preferred language is not English)
- Proximity to voters with disabilities
- Proximity to communities with low rates of household vehicle ownership
- Proximity to communities of eligible voters who are not registered to vote and may need access to same day voter registration
- Proximity to geographically isolated populations, including Native American reservations
- Accessible and free parking
- The distance and time a voter must travel by car or public transportation to a VC or BDB
- The need for alternate method for voters with disabilities for whom vote by mail ballots are not accessible to cast a ballot
- Traffic patterns
- The need for mobile VCs
- VC or BDB location on a public or private university or college campus

The Merced County ROV considers all the above, combined with knowledge of the County and data from our voter rolls to choose the best locations for our VCs and BDBs. In addition, we will solicit feedback from various stakeholders, interest groups and community members, including our language and disability communities.

The Voter's Choice Act (VCA) established a formula for determining the number of Vote Centers that a County must operate based on the number of registered voters in the County as determined

on the 88th day before Election Day. VCA counties must provide one 11-day Vote Center for every 50,000 registered voters and one four-day Vote Center for every 10,000 voters. In terms of Ballot Drop Boxes (BDB), the VCA requires that a County provide one location for every 15,000 voters. A County may not place a BDB at a VC to satisfy both requirements.

Based on the requirements detailed above, Merced County, with a little more than 128,000 registered voters must maintain at least three 11-day VCs and a total of 13 of the four-day VCs. The minimum required number of BDB that must be established in Merced County is nine (9).

VOTE CENTERS

As discussed in the previous section, Merced County is required to have three 11-day Vote Centers (VC). These will open 10 days prior to Election Day and be open on Election Day (for a total of 11 days each). As Merced County is also required to operate 13 four-day Vote Centers, an additional 10 VCs will open three days prior to Election Day and be open on Election Day (for a total of four days each). Thus, Merced County will have a total of 13 VCs open for the three days prior to Election Day and on Election Day. While we have studied the need for a mobile voting center capability in Merced County, we have determined that for at least the Presidential Primary in 2024, we will be unable to effectively build and deploy such a capability. We continue to analyze options and methods of implementation of this capability during future elections. In the meantime, we continue to expand our ability to serve voters in more locations through the addition of Ballot Drop Boxes (for more information on this, please read the following section: Ballot Drop Boxes).

VCs offer more voter services than traditional polling places. Additionally, any Merced County voter may go to any one of our 13 VCs to avail themselves of those services. A voter can get a replacement Vote by Mail ballot and ballot return envelope, drop off a voted Vote by Mail ballot, receive language assistance, mark a ballot using an Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessible device, register to vote and vote, or vote a provisional ballot. In addition, all VCs offer “curbside voting,” which allows voters who cannot get out of their vehicle or have health- or disability-related reasons for not entering a VC to receive services outside the Vote Center. Signage will inform voters about where the curbside voting area is and how to request help from the VC staff.

Vote Center staff will have real-time access to VoteCal, the statewide voter registration database and the County's Election Management System which will allow them to look up and update the status of each voter. Secure communication links will be provided by the Merced County Registrar of Voters. Each VC will have at least three ES&S ExpressVote accessible ballot marking devices available for use. For more information about the ballot marking devices, including how they make private and independent voting possible for voters with temporary and permanent disabilities, see the “Ensuring Access to VBM and Voting Locations” section below. Each VC will have a number of voting booths available. VCs will be set up and laid out in such a way that protects each voter’s right to cast a private and independent ballot. For additional information about the layout, please review Appendix D: Voter Center Layout. There will be at least one Ballot on Demand (BOD) printer at each location ensuring that we can provide the proper ballot to each voter. Roving MCE staff members (known as Rovers) will be trained and equipped with backup BOD printers in the event that there are printer issues or high volume of ballots that need printing.

Security will be ensured through set protocols from the Elections Code, the CA Secretary of State, and other relevant laws and regulations and will include having secure storage, tamper-evident seals, and strict chain of custody tracking for all equipment and elections material.

Election staff is trained to assist voters. MCE recruits election workers who provide language assistance in Spanish, Punjabi, Hmong, Chinese, and Mien (Elec. Code §14201). All Vote Center locations are supplied with appropriate signage and facsimile ballots in Punjabi, Hmong, Chinese and Mien and staff is trained on the purpose and proper handling of those facsimile ballots. All voting materials and ballots are in both English and Spanish per Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. Additionally, and as detailed below, each VC is supplied with a Multilingual Virtual Poll Worker (MVP). One way to give voters access to high quality interpreters is via the MVP. The MVP is essentially an iPad that sits atop a rolling stand with an external speaker – providing a simple way to display and communicate real time information in the voter’s native language. It solves language access issues for an affordable cost with video remote interpreting. At the touch of a button, a voter can instantly access a nationwide network of interpreters for real time communication.

A complete list of Vote Center locations and their hours of operation is included in Appendix B. All VCs are located inside accessible, secure, and safe buildings. Surveys of all locations to ensure compliance with ADA requirements for accessibility have been completed. Any deficiencies found are remedied prior to the opening of the VC. A complete and current list of all VC locations and their hours of operation will also be available on the Merced County Elections website beginning at least 29 days before Election Day.

BALLOT DROP BOXES

As was discussed in the Vote Center and Ballot Drop Box Location Considerations, Merced County is required to provide a minimum of nine (9) Ballot Drop Boxes (BDB) throughout the County. Elections administered in 2022 saw the Merced ROV deploy 12 BDB in the County. Based on the location considerations detailed previously, as well as public input, the Merced County ROV recently sought, and was granted, authorization from the Board of Supervisors to purchase additional BDBs. Thus, the Merced County Elections Office will deploy 21 BDBs during upcoming election cycles. Of those, 20 BDB will be available 28 days prior to Election Day and an additional one will be available at the Elections Central Count Facility on Election Day. Additional locations have been chosen to better serve the voters of the County, offering increased access to voters, and reducing the distance that many voters need to travel to get to a BDB.

Voters will be able to deposit their ballot, enclosed in their signed envelope, into one of the many secure BDBs available throughout the County. Multiple teams consisting of two (2) Merced County Ballot Retrievers will collect the ballots from the boxes on a mandated schedule.

All Ballot Drop Boxes will be available for use 28 days before Election Day and on Election Day. These boxes will be secure, accessible, and easy to identify. Both a drive-up and a walk-up BDB will be secured outside the Merced County Administration Building, 2222 M Street, Merced, CA and will be available 24 hours a day.

A complete list of Ballot Drop Box locations and their hours of operation is included in Appendix B. Surveys of all locations to ensure compliance with ADA requirements for accessibility have been completed. Any deficiencies found are remedied prior to the opening of the BDB. A complete and current list of all BDB locations and their hours of operation will also be available on the Merced County Elections website beginning at least 29 days before Election Day.

BUDGET & FISCAL IMPACT

Merced County’s goal is to increase voter access to all election activities, including registration, participation, and voting, while adhering to all relevant laws, regulation. We strive to effectively inform and educate voters and potential voters about registration requirements, Vote by Mail, and Vote Centers. To achieve this goal, extensive voter education and outreach is required. The ROV budget includes allocations for advertisements across mediums such as television, radio, print, digital, social media, participation in events, and printing and postage costs for mailings to registered voters. Below, you will find a chart displaying outreach expenses during the last two major statewide election cycles in 2020 and 2022, as well as our projected budget for FY 2023/2024, which includes the 2024 Presidential Primary in March 2024. PPE refers to Presidential Primary Election, PGE is Presidential General Election, SPE is Statewide Primary Election, and SGE refers to a Statewide General Election. Budgetary projections for the Presidential General Election in 2024 will take place in the next fiscal year and have not been calculated at this time.

Outreach Expense Comparison (<i>in dollars</i>)					
Election Year	2020 PPE (<i>actual</i>)	2020 PGE (<i>actual</i>)	2022 SPE (<i>actual</i>)	2022 SGE (<i>actual</i>)	2024 PPE (<i>projected</i>)
Election Type	Polling Place	VCA-like	VCA	VCA	VCA
Advertising/Media	13,920	21,601	34,246	16,530	60,600
Postcard Mailings	n/a	13,428	40,682	42,607	34,100
Outreach/Education Materials	3,538	2,389	7,684	3,731	17,000
Total	17,458	37,418	82,612	62,868	111,700

As the chart clearly shows, outreach expenses have increased greatly since the VCA model was implemented, first in a temporary status for the 2020 PGE and then in an official capacity for 2022. Postcard mailings, at least two of which are required under the VCA model before each election, represent one new expense, but the other spending categories have increased over time as well. Merced County ROV is taking learnings and best practices from prior elections and other jurisdictions in crafting a more aggressive outreach campaign in the coming years than we have seen in the past. Innovative advertising strategies and an increased focus on outreach events and educational materials are just a few of the areas where the budget reflects those new priorities.

While Vote Centers will be open for more days than traditional polling places, the total number of required elections workers is less compared to a traditional polling place model. In fact, whereas under a polling place model, it was necessary to recruit upwards of 400 or more poll workers, the Merced County ROV anticipates manning all VCs with approximately 153 staff members on Election Day. Other staff will be present in the Central Count Facility, the Main Elections Office, and on Ballot Retrieval Teams. Salary cost savings will be negligible when multiple days of VCs and additional training time are factored in. VC staff require additional training to manage the complexity and technology requirements of all the services offered at each VC. This training program is being completely renewed in advance of the Presidential Primary in 2024, drawing on learnings from 2022 as well as best practices from other jurisdictions. The training program will be conducted in person in the Merced County Elections Central Count Facility for the first time, making use of the newly designed training classroom. The space will allow for hands on training on all equipment, a mock VC setup, and personalized training, as needed. Included in the training

will be de-escalation training and preparation for emergencies. The Central Count Facility provides increased access to staff with disabilities due to its size and layout. Recruitment efforts will begin in earnest in November 2023 in advance of the March 2024 Presidential Primary.

Election Worker recruitment will occur across multiple channels and throughout the entire geography of the County. Special emphasis will be on adding language capabilities to our team to ensure that all Vote Centers are able to offer that critical component to address voters' language needs. More information about ROV recruitment efforts will be forthcoming to the public and shared across all ROV media channels, as well as advertised in paid media space. In addition to targeting language capabilities, student groups, disability groups, and other community partners will be included in recruitment efforts.

Election expenses have continued to rise over time in Merced County. While most categories have seen increased since 2020, it is particularly acute in salaries/benefits, printing costs, and other indirect costs. While it is standard for costs to be lower during a primary election, the Merced County ROV believes that some costs from the 2022 SGE can be reduced from operational efficiencies.

Fiscal Impact / Cost Savings: Election Expense Comparison (<i>in dollars</i>)				
Election Year	2020 PPE (<i>actual</i>)	2020 PGE (<i>actual</i>)	2022 SPE (<i>actual</i>)	2022 SGE (<i>actual</i>)
Election Type	Polling Place	VCA-like	VCA	VCA
Salaries/Benefits	258,958	331,383	269,580	342,654
Printing	375,250	418,265	348,229	523,051
Postage	37,992	107,400	52,045	88,678
Professional Services	25,048	43,798	6,873	9,521
Support Services	36,836	71,463	34,757	105,374
Communication/Outreach	15,161	15,160	96,796	51,978
Other Direct Costs	27,217	32,236	46,285	61,941
Other Indirect Costs	253,733	323,362	308,181	392,267
Total	1,030,195	1,343,067	1,162,746	1,575,464

PLAN TO MAKE VOTING LOCATIONS SAFE/HEALTHY

When VCs are not in operation, the site and equipment will be secured through established security protocols and secure storage facilities. All election equipment goes through extensive Logic & Accuracy (L&A) Testing to ensure each piece of equipment is in proper working order. All equipment is transported by two-person Election Teams via an appropriately sized vehicle with lift gates. Elections equipment is equipped with back up batteries that have a 4-hour life and replacement equipment will be available from MCE Rover Teams. Information Technology staff is on-site and on call to assist with any technological issues. All VCs will have a complete list of other VCs so that voters can be referred to the nearest VC or the MCE Office, as needed.

The Merced County Sheriff, Merced County District Attorney, California Highway Patrol, and Police Departments in the cities of Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos and Merced will be furnished with a list of all VC and BDB locations. It is requested that should an issue arise; the agency contact the Merced County Registrar of Voters or the Assistant Registrar of Voters immediately to provide information on the disruption. VC staff will contact the Elections Office Call Center to inform them of any disturbance encountered. The call center will provide direction and dispatch a field team member to assist as needed.

In the event of a major emergency, the Merced County Registrar of Voters will be in contact with the California Secretary of State's Office to make sure that media updates are provided to the public. If a natural disaster occurs that affects a VC or causes it to have to close, the staff will follow end of day closing procedures to secure all equipment in accordance with state law. If the location is no longer able to be used, notifications and signage will be posted to direct voters to an alternate location. If a BDB location is affected, signage and notifications will be posted to direct voters to an alternate location.

ENSURING ACCESS TO VBM AND VOTING LOCATIONS

Merced County is committed to providing and improving accessibility in the electoral process. All VCs are equipped with ExpressVote machines (accessible ballot marking devices) to provide voters with disabilities the ability to vote privately and independently. Each VC will have a minimum of three ExpressVote ballot marking devices (BMDs). While any voter may use the BMDs, they are especially important for voters with temporary or permanent disabilities, because they have features that enable voters with disabilities to exercise their right to vote privately and independently. "Privately and independently" means these devices enable them to vote without having to rely on another person to help them read and mark their ballot and without having to reveal how they are voting to anyone else, protecting their right to cast a secret ballot. The features of the BMDs include a touchscreen; a handheld controller with Braille and buttons in different shapes and colors; options to change text size and color contrast on the screen; headphones for listening to an audio version of the ballot and audio instructions for navigating and marking the ballot electronically; and ports for connecting other assistive technology, such as a sip-and-puff device.

As was written in the earlier Vote Center section, all VCs offer "curbside voting," which allows voters who cannot get out of their vehicle or have health- or disability-related reasons for not entering a VC to receive services outside the Vote Center. Signage will inform voters about where the curbside voting area is and how to request help from the VC staff.

Each Vote Center has bilingual staff as well as a Multilingual Virtual Poll Worker (MVP). Merced County Registrar of Voters was a recipient of a 2019 Clearinghouse "Clearie" Award for improving accessibility for voters. We received the award for utilizing the MVP to assist voters who are deaf or hard of hearing by providing a direct iPad-based connection to American Sign Language Interpreters. The MVP may also be used to provide interpreters for over 200 languages.

Any voter may also opt to go online, through the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) system, to request a downloadable ballot. The RAVBM system was created to securely deliver ballots to voters with disabilities and to military and overseas voters. The RAVBM provides voters with the ability to request a VBM ballot be delivered electronically to the voter from an authorized website. Specifically, the RAVBM system allows voters to access, read, and mark an electronic version of their ballot on their own device, such as a personal computer. Because they are using their own device, they can also use their own assistive technology, such as a screen reader, to navigate, read, and mark their ballot. In order to use RAVBM, a voter must have access to the necessary equipment, including an internet-connected computer or similar device and a printer. Once the voter marks the ballot using the RAVBM system, the voter must print the ballot on paper and return the printed ballot to Merced County elections officials using the same return methods that apply to paper Vote by Mail ballots.

Elections materials in alternative formats, such as large print or audio formats, may be requested from the Merced County Elections Office by contacting us through phone, email, fax, or in person at our main office. In addition, the County Voter Information Guide will be made available online at our website so that voters may view it on their personal devices.

Information regarding Vote Centers, the toll-free voter phone line, and voting options (including how to sign up for RAVBM) will be distributed to all voters, including those who may have accessibility challenges, through the following:

- Newspapers
- Radio
- Digital advertising
- Social Media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@MercedCountyROV)
- Merced County Elections Website www.mercedelections.org
- Workshops/presentations – coordinated with members or representatives of voters
- Public Service Announcements broadly distributed through County agencies and other outlets

Merced County Registrar of Voters works with local agencies and groups that support and provide services for persons with disabilities to determine the best and most effective methods to deliver this information to the affected groups.

The Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) was established in 2017 and meets quarterly. It is an all-volunteer committee established to advise on issues related to voting accessibility for elections and elections materials. The VAAC advises and assists with implementation of federal and state laws relating to access to the electoral process by voters with disabilities so that all persons eligible to vote can participate in the voting process. It also provides recommendations identifying and prioritizing activities, programs, and policies to ensure every voter has equal access to the ballot. The committee members can also assist with outreach in their communities. Additional information regarding the VAAC may be found on the Merced County Elections website at www.countyofmerced.com/3678/Voting-Accessibility-Advisory-Committee. Materials posted there include past meeting information as well as the online application to join our VAAC.

The Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) was also established in 2017 and meets quarterly. The LAAC is an all-volunteer committee established to provide advice on issues related to language accessibility for voters with limited English proficiency, so that all persons eligible to vote can understand and participate in the voting process. Additionally, the committee can assist with outreach in the communities. Additional information regarding the LAAC may be found on the Merced County Elections website at www.countyofmerced.com/3677/Language-Accessibility-Advisory-Committee. Materials posted there include past meeting information as well as the online application to join our LAAC.

After every election conducted in compliance with the Voter's Choice Act, Merced County Elections will make a reasonable effort to identify and address significant disparities in voter accessibility and participation. This effort will include meeting with the VAAC and LAAC to address and discuss issues that their communities or members experienced during the election. Importantly, all Elections Staff will be surveyed to evaluate and address disparities regarding voter accessibility and participation that may have occurred during the election. In addition, a comprehensive post-election review will be conducted by the department to review the planned

administration of the election versus the actual administration of the election so that significant disparities in voter accessibility and participation can be discovered and remedied, along with other inefficiencies that may be identified. This review will allow the Elections Staff to capture lessons learned and prepare implementation plans for the next election.

TOLL-FREE VOTER ASSISTANCE

Information promoting the Merced County Registrar of Voters toll-free voter assistance hotline (phone number: 1-800-561-0619) will be provided on all pre-election mailings sent out to voters, including, but not limited to, address confirmation mailings and voter information packets. The toll-free hotline will be available for use no later than 29 days prior to Election Day. Elections staff answering this hotline are trained on procedures for accepting relay calls from California Relay Service (711) for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing and for answering calls from voters who need assistance in a language other than English.

Section 2 – Voter Education and Outreach Plan

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

2-A Use of media, including social media, newspapers, radio and television for purposes of informing voters of the availability of a Vote by Mail ballot in an accessible format and the process for requesting such a ballot.

EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(i)(VIII)

Merced County is committed to providing extensive voter education and outreach. Merced County Elections will continue to participate in meaningful events that have been attended in the past as well as develop effective ways of communicating with our voters. MCE works hard to increase its presence and visibility in the community. This includes continuing to establish and maintain partnerships and meet with committees and organizations as well as with the Language Accessibility Advisory and Voting Accessibility Advisory Committees (LAAC and VAAC). The goal of the Merced County Registrar of Voters is to work with community partners and provide them with resources and information that they can share with their larger networks.

Information regarding Vote by Mail and for obtaining an accessible ballot will be disseminated using the following outlets and methods:

- Public Service Announcements
- Print Messages in the form of press releases
- Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter - @MercedCountyROV)
- Digital advertising
- Department Website www.mercedelections.org
- Merced County Website
- Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee Meetings
- Language Accessibility Advisory Committee Meetings
- Community Partners
- High Schools, Merced Community College, and UC Merced
- Materials in other languages
- Language Assistance at Vote Centers
- Community Outreach Events
- Direct Contact with Voters
- Newspapers
- Radio
- Publicly displayed banners
- Digital billboards

Outreach efforts are continuous and ongoing, including speaking engagements throughout the community, attendance at community fairs and events, and a baseline level of advertising. These

efforts will be increased approximately 120 prior to Election Day to drive positive voter outcomes centered on registration and participation.

Merced has a growing population of college students at Merced Community College and University of California, Merced. Efforts in voter education to these populations will be consistent and on-going. Among those efforts will be targeted digital advertising using geo-fence location technology to reach student and faculty populations who frequent campuses. Outreach events in the form of voter registration drives, passport application events with voter registration components, and others will be staffed and supported where possible.

The Merced County Registrar of Voters website (www.mercedelections.org) has a page dedicated to information about the Voter's Choice Act (www.countyofmerced.com/3656/Voters-Choice-Act). Information is in accessible formats and is publicly available. This includes the Election Administration Plan and other information related to the Voter's Choice Act, including scheduled public presentations, developed infographics, public notices, digital versions of material used to educate the public and LAAC/VAAC agendas, minutes and information. The website also contains information about registering to vote and getting involved in the election process, including working at a Vote Center. Additional information found on the website is addressed in the appropriate sections of this plan.

Merced County does not have local television stations that serve primarily Merced County residents. Rather, Merced County residents are served by regional television/radio stations most of which are located in Fresno and serve the greater Central Valley region. Merced County will reach out to the regional television stations/radio stations. We will also continue to partner with both Madera and Fresno counties to combine our efforts to educate our respective voters using television ads on multiple TV stations.

2-B Community Presence to Educate Voters on the Voter's Choice Act **EC §4005(a)(10)(i)(III)**

Merced County's community presence will provide Vote Center Model information directly to the voters and attendees of a wide variety of events. Merced County's goal is to continue coordinating with our community partners, the Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) and Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC), to identify opportunities to educate our voters, offer demonstrations of the voting equipment, and explain how to request and obtain an accessible ballot. Merced County will make every effort to reach all areas of the County. Voters will have many opportunities to learn about the Vote Center Model and their voting options including, but not limited to, the following:

- Department's VAAC and LAAC
 - Held quarterly and posted on social media and the Department website
 - Meetings include voting system demonstrations and informational updates
 - Materials developed with VAAC and LAAC members, and presented for distribution within their communities
- On-going presentations to various audiences held year-round:
 - Neighborhood associations
 - County Board of Supervisors
 - City Councils and City Clerks
 - Town Hall meetings with elected officials
 - School District Boards

- Special District Boards
- County Central Committees and Political Committees
- Faith-based communities
- Language communities
- Philanthropic organizations (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.)
- Merced County Public Libraries
- Head Start and other programs providing community services

Outreach for these presentations takes many forms, including the use of Department platforms to announce attendance. In addition, many groups will post their agendas specifying the Merced County ROV Presentation as one of their agenda items.

Among the community fairs, civic events, club events, and other events that the Merced County ROV has attended, or will attend, this year are:

- Merced Sunrise Rotary Club meetings
- Merced Rotary Club meetings
- Atwater Rotary Club meetings
- Merced Breakfast Lions Club meetings
- Merced Elks Lodge meetings
- Merced County Association of Realtor meetings
- Atwater Kiwanis Club meeting
- League of Women Voters meetings
- Republican Women Federated meetings
- Merced County Office of Education (MCOE) Head Start Program monthly trainings
- Merced County City-County Dinners
- California Central Valley Journey for Justice meetings
- Merced County Town Halls
- Merced County Board of Supervisor meetings
- Merced County Spring Fair
- Merced County Fair
- Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
- American Legion
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- Merced College Extreme Registration Event
- High School Career Fairs
- Los Banos Egg Hunt
- The Mercado Downtown Fair
- Southeast Asian Mental Health Day Fair
- Los Banos Downtown Sprint Street Fair
- High School Voter Education Presentation
- Open Cockpit Day at Castle Air Museum
- Planada Community Day
- Elementary School Culture Night “Around the World” Event
- Dad’s Day Out Fair
- Central Valley Craft Food and Spirits Festival
- National Night Out Event
- Bombs Away Car Show
- Jobs That Move Outreach Event

- Livingston Sweet Potato Festival
- Dos Palos Cotton Festival
- Study Abroad Fair
- Los Banos Fun Fest
- Merced Girl Scouts Democracy Badge Night
- Junior Pilot Day at Castle Air Museum
- Halloween Trunk or Treat and Movie Night Festival
- Los Banos Chamber of Commerce Annual Holiday Parade
- Toys for Tots Event
- Merced Hmong New Year

The Merced County ROV prioritizes opportunities to engage with the public and spread the message about its work in support of elections. While the Department is not a large one in terms of fulltime employees, its reach is far across the County. For the majority of festivals, fairs, and civic events, the Merced County ROV staffs the event with a bilingual capability of English and Spanish. Where possible, other language capabilities are added for specific events (e.g. Hmong New Year).

2-C Use of Resources for Voter Education and Outreach

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(VII\)](#)

Merced County will continue to spend the necessary resources to ensure voters are informed about the Vote Center Model voting process. This includes, but is not limited to, informing voters about topics such their ability to update their language and party preferences, same-day voter registration, early voting, and signing up with “Where’s My Ballot?”, also known as BallotTrax, to track their VBM ballot.

2-D Direct contacts with voters providing information on the upcoming election and promoting the toll-free voter assistance hotline

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(X\)](#)

Merced County will contact each registered voter a minimum of two times, by mail, to provide information on the upcoming election and the availability of Merced County’s toll-free voter assistance hotline. The two direct contacts will be conducted not earlier than 120 days before Election Day and not later than 29 days before Election Day and will include information about the VCA election model, Ballot Drop Box locations and their dates and hours of availability, Vote Center locations and their dates and hours of availability, information about the availability of the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) system and additional information about the upcoming election.

2-E Postage-paid postcard for requesting materials in an alternate language or an accessible format VBM

[EC §4005\(a\)\(8\)\(B\)\(iii\)](#)

All registered voters will receive a postage-paid postcard with their bilingual County Voter Information Guide for requesting materials in languages other than English and to request a Vote by Mail ballot in an alternate format. Instructions will be included in the County Voter Information Guide, which is one document with both English and Spanish translations in it, and on the Registrar of Voter’s website (www.countyofmerced.com/3631/Voters) for completing and returning the postcard.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH WITH LANGUAGE MINORITY COMMUNITIES

EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(i)(I)

The Registrar of Voters established a Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) in 2017 to advise and assist with implementation of federal and state laws relating to access to the electoral process by non-English preference voters. The committee meets quarterly. Additional information regarding the LAAC may be found on the Merced County Elections website at www.countyofmerced.com/3677/Language-Accessibility-Advisory-Committee. Materials posted there include past meeting information as well as the online application to join our LAAC. The LAAC is comprised of local residents and regional and statewide organizations and partners who advocate on behalf of the County's language minority communities. Language minority communities are composed of individuals whose primary or preferred language is not English. Various organizations are invited to these meetings including: Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Foundation of Northern California, and many others. Our partners are critical to the successful administration of Merced County elections and we are grateful for their support.

2-F Inform Voters of the Upcoming Election and Promote the Toll-Free Voter Assistance Hotline with Media Serving Language Minority Communities

EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(i)(I)

No earlier than 120 days before Election Day, information sharing efforts with language minority communities, including information about the Vote Center Model, voting options, language accessibility, and toll-free voter assistance hotline for assistance, will be conducted to include:

- Television (Stations to be determined no later than 120 days prior to Election Day)*
- Newspapers (Newspapers of General Circulation in Merced County: (Merced Sun Star, Merced County Times)
- Radio (Stations to be determined no later than 120 days prior to Election Day)*
- Social Media (@MercedCountyROV) and Department's Website (www.mercedelections.org)
- Materials sharing with such groups as community partners, elected officials for their newsletters, cities, special districts, school districts, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and Public Information Officers
- Media Availability Sessions
- Public Service Announcements, broadly distributed to outlets serving the County
- County Departments (such as Human Services Agency, Veteran Services, Probation, and Child Support Services)

****Merced County does not have local television stations that serve primarily Merced County residents. Rather, Merced County residents are served by regional television stations most of which are located in Fresno and serve the greater Central Valley region.***

To mitigate this limitation, the Merced County Registrar's Office has initiated an intense effort to educate voters, as suggested by stakeholders during our VAAC and LAAC meetings. Stakeholders have indicated that voters in their communities are most likely to respond to outreach efforts conducted through local organizations, groups and agencies with whom they already have existing relationships with. Accordingly, the Registrar's Office will continue to conduct presentations with community partners. The Registrar's

website will have a similar list that will be updated regularly, affording interested parties the opportunity to choose when and where they can participate.

The specific media outlets that will be utilized for outreach to the non-English preference voters has yet to be determined. The determination will be made in consultation with the Language Accessibility Advisory Committee based on available resources, media audiences and experience.

2-G Identifying Language Minority Voters

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(V\)](#)

The Registrar of Voters uses the voter's language preference selection shown on their voter registration form to identify language minority voters. These are voters whose primary or preferred language is not English. Voters may also contact us by telephone or email to update their language preference or provide their language preference to elections officials during an election. Information produced by the Registrar is printed in both English and Spanish.

2-H Voter Education Workshop for Language Minority Voters

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(VI\)](#), [EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(VI\)\(ia\)](#)

The Registrar of Voters will hold a bilingual voter education workshop for each of Merced County's federal and state required languages. At the time of preparing this plan, Merced's required languages, other than English are Spanish, Chinese, Hmong, Mien and Punjabi.

These workshops will be held prior to every statewide election cycle and will provide an opportunity for the County's language communities to receive information about materials and assistance available in the specified language, in addition to the Vote Center Model voting process. All workshops will have language-specific interpreters to assist attendees. Information about workshop events will be announced at least 10 days in advance of the meeting date on all Merced County ROV social media, the Department Website, and in notifications to our language minority community partners.

2-I Public Service Announcement for Language Minority Citizens

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(IX\)](#)

The Merced County Registrar of Voters uses Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to inform voters in language minority communities of the upcoming election and the toll-free voter assistance hotline. The PSAs are distributed through language minority television, radio and newspapers.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH WITH DISABILITY COMMUNITIES

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(A\)\(ii\)](#)

The Merced County Registrar of Voters established a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) in 2017 to advise and assist with access to the electoral process by voters with disabilities. The committee meets quarterly. Additional information regarding the VAAC may be found on the Merced County Elections website at www.countyofmerced.com/3678/Voting-Accessibility-Advisory-Committee. Materials posted there include past meeting information as well as the online application to join our VAAC. The VAAC is comprised of local residents and regional and

statewide organizations and partners who advocate on behalf of the County's disability community. Various organizations are invited to these meetings including: The Center of Vision Enhancement (COVE), Cerebral Palsy Association, Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), Disability Rights California, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Foundation of Northern California, and Merced College Disabled Students Program & Services among many others. We continue to work closely with the Center of Vision Enhancement (COVE) to offer in-person demonstrations of our accessibility devices. Each election we provide COVE with an ExpressVote in their locations to provide those voters with vision impairments access to the device to assist in marking their ballot. Our partners are critical to the successful administration of Merced County elections and we are grateful for their support.

2-J Website has publicly available accessible information

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(IV\)](#)

Information on the Merced County Registrar of Voters website (www.mercedelections.org) is in accessible formats and is publicly available. This includes the Election Administration Plan and other information related to the Voter's Choice Act, as well as information about registering to vote and getting involved in the election process. All voting materials and election-specific information is also available on the website in an accessible format, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The information to be provided will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- All voters will receive a Vote by Mail (VBM) ballot.
- The option to use an accessible voting device at any Vote Center, and how to use the device.
- The method for requesting, marking and submitting an accessible ballot through the County's Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) program.

2-K A description of how the county elections official will educate and communicate the provisions of this section to the public, including: The disability community, including organizations and individuals that advocate on behalf of, or provide services to, individuals with disabilities. The county elections official shall hold at least one voter education workshop to increase accessibility and participation of eligible voters with disabilities.

[EC §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(VI\), §4005\(a\)\(10\)\(I\)\(i\)\(VI\)\(ib\)](#)

No earlier than 120 days prior to Election Day, information sharing with the disability community, including information about the Vote Center Model, voting options, including RAVBM, and toll-free voter access hotline for assistance will be conducted to include:

- Television (Stations to be determined no later than 120 days prior to Election Day)
- Newspapers (Adjudicated Newspapers of General Circulation in Merced County)
- Radio (Stations to be determined no later than 120 days prior to Election Day)
- Social Media (@MercedCountyROV) and Department's Website (www.mercedelections.org)
- Materials sharing with such groups as community partners, elected officials for their newsletters, cities, special districts, school districts, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and Public Information Officers
- Media Availability Sessions
- Public Service Announcements, broadly distributed to outlets serving the County

- County Departments (such as Human Services Agency, Veteran Services, Probation, and Child Support Services)

When applicable, Public Service Announcements will be accessible for voters who are deaf or hard of hearing and voters who are blind or visually impaired.

The Merced County Registrar of Voters will hold a voter education workshop prior to every statewide election cycle to increase accessibility and participation of eligible voters with disabilities. The workshop will include, but not be limited to, education about the Vote Center Model, new voting equipment demonstrations, the accessibility of the voting equipment, ballot drop-off information, and options for obtaining an accessible Vote by Mail ballot electronically. Information about the workshop will be announced at least 10 days in advance of the meeting date on all Merced County ROV social media, the Department website, and in notifications to our disability community partners.

Section 3 – Appendices

Appendix A: Language Requirements

Appendix B: Proposed Vote Center and Ballot Drop Box Locations and Hours of Operation

Appendix C: Map of Vote Center and Ballot Drop Box Locations

Appendix D: Vote Center Layout

Appendix E: Security and Contingency Plans

Appendix A – Language Requirements

Merced County has a federal mandate under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act to provide election materials in Spanish, as well as English.

Additionally, under the provisions of California Elections Code 14201, Merced County must provide bilingual assistance and facsimile ballots in the following languages: Chinese, Punjabi, Mien, and Hmong.

Appendix B – Proposed Vote Center and Ballot Drop Box Locations and Hours of Operation

VOTE CENTER (VC) LOCATIONS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

Vote Centers*

The following locations will be open ten (10) days prior to Election Day and on Election Day (for a total of eleven (11) open days):

Atwater Community Center
760 E. Bellevue Road
Atwater, CA 95301

Los Banos Community Center
645 7th Street
Los Banos, CA 93635

Merced Community College Gymnasium Lobby
3600 M St
Merced, CA 95348

All three 11-day Vote Centers will be open February 24, 2024 to March 4, 2024 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and open on March 5, 2024 (Election Day) from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm.

The following locations will be open three (3) days prior to Election Day and on Election Day (for a total of four (4) open days):

Al Goman Community Center
745 Linden Avenue
Gustine, CA 95322

College Greens Park – Scripps Building
1815 Scripps Drive
Los Banos, CA 93635

Delhi Veterans Memorial Building (VFW Hall)
9799 Stephens Street
Delhi, CA 95315

Department of Child Support Services
3368 N. State Hwy 59, Suite A
Merced, CA 95348

Dos Palos D.E.S. Hall
1357 Elgin Ave
Dos Palos, CA 93620

Hilmar Grange Hall
8188 Lander Avenue
Hilmar, CA 95324

Livingston Veteran Memorial Building
1605 7th Street
Livingston, CA 95334

Merced County Fairgrounds – Tioga Hall
900 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Merced, CA 95341

Planada Community Center
9167 Stanford Avenue
Planada, CA 95365

Winton Community Hall
7091 W. Walnut Avenue
Winton, CA 95388

All four-day Vote Centers will be open March 2, 2024 to March 4, 2024 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and open on March 5, 2024 (Election Day) from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm.

***Please note that these locations are still subject to change.**

BALLOT DROP BOX (BDB) LOCATIONS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

Ballot Drop Boxes*

You may drop off your VBM ballot at any of the following locations 28 days prior to Election Day and on Election Day during the hours listed:

BDB Location	Hours of Operation
Rancho San Miguel Market 1930 Yosemite Parkway Merced, CA 95340	Every day - February 5, 2024 - March 4, 2024 5:00 AM - 10:00 PM Tuesday, March 5, 2024 5:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Liberty Market 16385 Schendel Avenue Delhi, CA 95315	Every day - February 5, 2024 - March 4, 2024 8:00 AM - 9:30 PM Tuesday, March 5, 2024 5:00 AM - 8:00 PM
City of Atwater 750 Bellevue Road Atwater, CA 95301	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Except Holidays

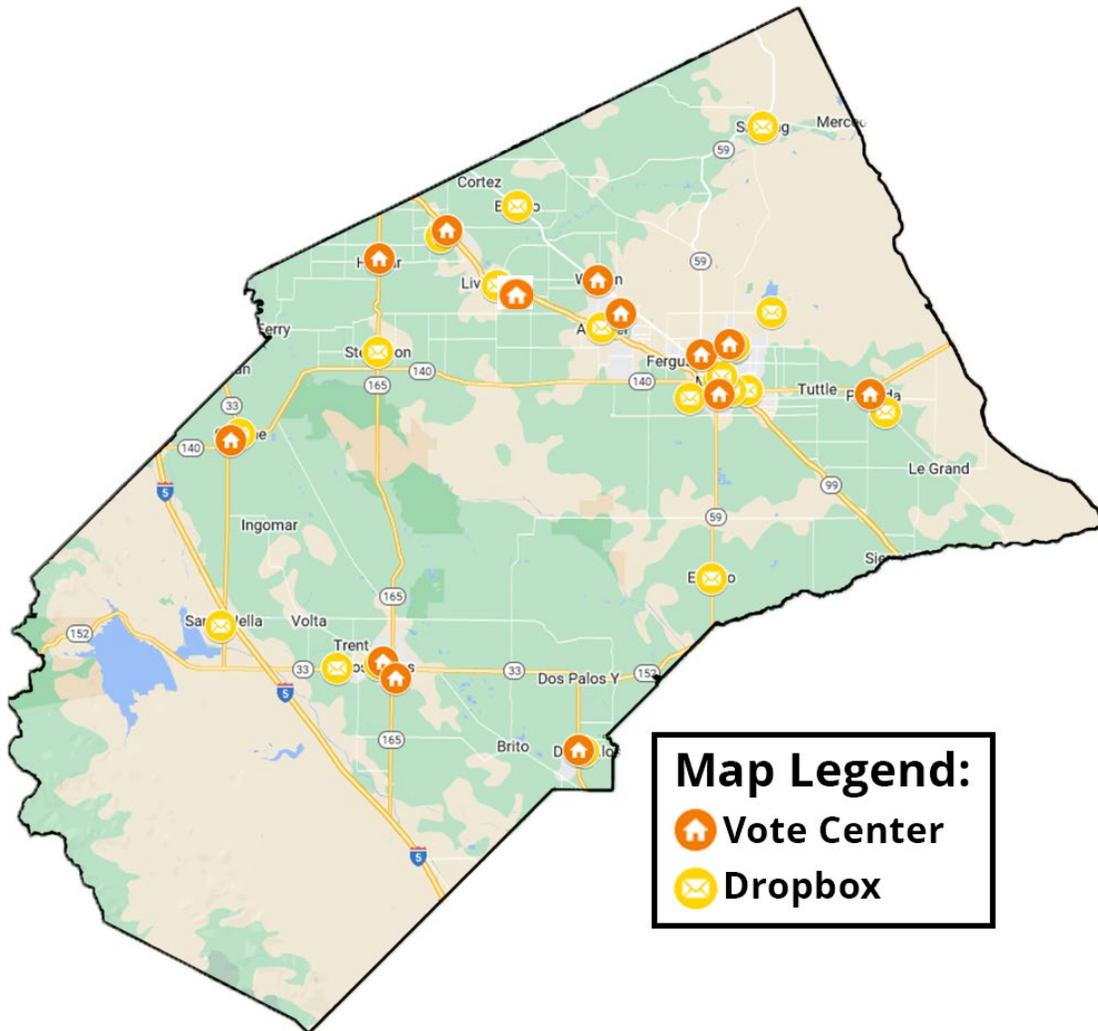
City of Dos Palos 2174 Blossom Street Dos Palos, CA 93620	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM Except Holidays
City of Gustine 352 5th Street Gustine, CA 95322	Monday - Thursday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM; Friday 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM Except Holidays
City of Livingston 1416 C Street Livingston, CA 95334	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Except Holidays
City of Los Banos 520 J Street Los Banos, CA 93635	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Closed from 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM Except Holidays
City of Merced 678 W. 18th Street Merced, CA 95340	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Except Holidays
University of California, Merced ASUCM – Student Government Granite Pass Room 174 5400 N. Lake road Merced, CA 95343	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Except Holidays
Sprouts Farmers Market 171 E. Yosemite Avenue Merced, CA 95340	Every day - February 5, 2024 - March 4, 2024 7:00 AM - 10:00 PM Tuesday, March 5, 2024 7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Merced County Fire Department #65 Snelling Station 15974 State Highway 59 Snelling, CA 95369	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Merced County Fire Department #72 Santa Nella Station 29190 W. Centinella Dr Santa Nella, CA 95322	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Merced County Fire Department #83 El Nido Station 10537 CA Hwy 59 El Nido, CA 95317	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Merced County Fire Department #84 Le Grand Station 3875 Santa Fe Avenue Le Grand, CA 95333	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Merced County Fire Department #92 Ballico Station 11284 Ballico Avenue Ballico, CA 95303	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Merced County Fire Department #97 Stevinson Station 2738 Lander Ave Stevinson, CA 95374	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Merced College Los Banos Campus - Student Services Building 22240 Highway 152 Los Banos, CA 93635	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Except Holidays
City of Merced Airport 20 Macready Dr Merced, CA 95341	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 5, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Except Holidays
Elections Central Count Facility 250 E. 15th Street Merced, CA 95341	Tuesday, March 5, 2024 7:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Merced County Administration Parking Lot Drive Up 2222 M Street Merced, CA 95340	Everyday February 5, 2024 - March 4, 2024 24 hours Tuesday, March 5, 2024 12:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Merced County Administration Building Lobby 2222 M Street Merced, CA 95340	Monday - Friday February 5, 2024 - March 4, 2024 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Tuesday, March 5, 2024 7:00 AM - 8:00 PM Except Holidays

The Drive Up BDB located in the Merced County Administration Parking Lot will be available 24 hours per day until closing on Election Day at 8:00 pm.

***Please note locations are subject to change.**

Appendix C – Map of Vote Center and Ballot Drop Box Locations



Appendix D – Vote Center Layout

Illustrative Vote Center Layout – actual layouts will vary based on specifics of each facility.



Every Vote Center in Merced County will maintain a minimum of three ExpressVote ballot marking devices.

DS300 poll place scanners will be used to tabulate ballots cast in person.

Appendix E – Security and Contingency Plans

Security and Contingency Plans

EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(vi)(VIII)

Ensuring the Security of Voting

EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(iv)

The Merced County Elections Office will ensure the security of voting conducted at Vote Centers (VCs) using the following methods and standards:

- All VC staff is trained and prepared to assist eligible voters.
- VC staff has access to the same election management system (EMS) used in the past and will be able to determine if a voter is properly registered, whether the voter has received a ballot, whether the voter has returned a ballot, and what type of ballot to issue the voter to ensure every eligible voter casts the ballot he or she is eligible to vote in each election.
- All laptops connected to the election management system are also connected to VoteCal, the official statewide voter registration database managed by the California Secretary of State. VoteCal will track voters across the state and notify VC staff if a voter is actively registered in another county and if the voter has received and/or returned a ballot in another county.
- Any and all equipment that is connected to the election management system's server is in full compliance with all security measures and regulations (EC§20158), with the assistance of Merced County Information Services staff.
- Each VC will have equipment, resources, and signage placed strategically to ensure every voter has the opportunity to cast a private and independent vote.
- The ExpressVote ballot marking device and DS300 precinct tabulator will not be connected to any network. All equipment is sealed with official election seals and shut down and locked when Vote Centers are not open.
- Any and all recorded votes, including paper ballots, Conditional Voter Registration (CVR), provisional ballots, and Vote by Mail ballots, are securely transported to the Merced County Elections Central Count Facility daily after the VC closes.

Prevention Measures and Potential Disruptions

EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(vi)(VIII)(ia), EC §4005(a)(10)(I)(vi)(VIII)(ib)

All elections and VC staff are trained and prepared for potential disruptions at Vote Centers. This includes having battery backup capabilities for equipment and a plan to route voters to other locations, as necessary. The Merced County Registrar of Voters office has experienced staff on duty to be able to distribute needed replacement materials and equipment. Furthermore, staff will be equipped to troubleshoot equipment.