



Legislation Text

File #: 2019-1580, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Supervisors of Sonoma County
Department or Agency Name(s): Clerk-Recorder-Assessor-Registrar of Voters
Staff Name and Phone Number: Kim Barrett 565-3471
Vote Requirement: 4/5th
Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Title:

Compensation for precinct officers and polling places

Recommended Action:

- A) Adopt a resolution increasing compensation for election precinct officers, current county employees serving as election precinct officers, polling places and adding a bi-lingual premium effective January 1, 2020.
- B) Approve use of up to \$32,200 in General Fund contingencies, if needed based on FY 2019-20 mid-year estimates (4/5th Vote Required)

Executive Summary:

The Registrar of Voters office continually struggles with getting and retaining polling place workers, especially those that are bi-lingual, and to find polling place locations that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Registrar of Voters office has not increased the poll worker stipend since 2006 and has conducted a survey to determine what other counties pay to election precinct offers. The average or median \$132 stipend is above what Sonoma County currently pays by \$32, and by \$19 from what other counties pay for training and by \$15 for bilingual workers. The Registrar of Voters office is recommending an increase to precinct officer stipends and polling place rents as well as adding a bi-lingual premium. Today's Board action authorizes increases to poll worker stipends paid to Clerks from \$100 to \$125, Inspectors from \$125 to \$175, establishes a bilingual premium of \$25, and increase the rent paid to polling places from \$60 to \$100. The Department may need to request use of up to \$32,200 in General Fund contingencies in the current fiscal year based on mid-year estimates when more updated information is available to determine whether the department will be able to absorb the cost.

Discussion:

Background:

The Registrar of Voters office recruits approximately 1,400 registered voters as Precinct Officers to staff approximately 2000 polling places in a countywide election in Sonoma County. Precinct Officers (also called Inspectors and Clerks) work approximately 15 to 16 hours each Election Day, arriving at the polls at 6:00 a.m. and completing their duties between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m. In addition, the Inspectors (those in charge of the polling places) have pre- and post-election day responsibilities, including arranging for access to the polling place on election morning, attending mandatory training, picking up all supplies and ballots and transporting to the polls, and returning all ballots and supplies to the assigned receiving center on election night.

Inspectors and Clerks set up polling places and electronic accessible equipment according to legal standards, locate voter names on rosters, obtain voter signatures, provide instruction to voters, issue, receive, and deposit ballots, set up and clean up polling places. Inspectors and Clerks also must transport supplies and ballots on election night back to the Registrar of Voters Office or to a designated Return Center. Starting in 2020, the Precinct Officers will also be responsible for issuing Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) paperwork and forms to voters at the polling places, which will allow voters to conditionally register and vote on the day of the election. These civic-minded citizens volunteer to perform these critical tasks and receive a nominal stipend for their services. Since 2006, Sonoma County Precinct Inspectors have received \$135 plus mileage, and Clerks have received \$100 for the day.

Precinct Officer recruitment has been a daunting task for many years. Despite various programs targeted toward particular groups - such as the Sonoma County Employee Precinct Officer Program and the Student Precinct Officer Program - we have to still scramble to replace up to a third of those initially appointed in any given election, including some who resign on Election Day itself.

In acknowledgement of the difficulty faced in recruiting and retaining Precinct Officers, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution 94-1512 in 1994 for management employees and Resolution 04-0120 in 2004 for non-management employees, authorizing them to receive their normal pay while serving as precinct officers, to attend trainings associated with serving as precinct officers, and to create the greatest available pool of qualified, reliable volunteers. County employees receive the same stipend as other precinct officers \$135 or \$100, depending on if they serve as an inspector or clerk. Employees must also get supervisor approval before signing up to serve. Depending on workload some employees may be denied the privilege of serving as a precinct officer.

Comparable counties pay more on average than Sonoma County currently pays for Precinct Officers. Other counties also pay for Officers to attend training, which Sonoma does not pay for. If comparable counties current stipend is added to their training stipend, it generally is more than the recommended Sonoma County stipend increase. The average stipend for a clerk is \$132 and the average training stipend is \$19, for a total combined stipend of \$151. Sonoma County is proposing an increase in the stipend from \$100 to \$125. The average stipend for an inspector is \$163, with a training stipend of \$33, for a total combined average of \$196. Sonoma County is proposing an increase to \$175. Other counties did not indicate whether they paid employees differently than non-employees for stipends.

Proposed Increase to Precinct Officer Stipend:

To compensate Precinct Officers more favorably, and to acknowledge the additional training and responsibilities associated with the implementation of the new voting system and upcoming legislative changes, the department is proposing that the stipend paid to Inspectors in Sonoma County be raised from \$135 to \$175 per election (including training, but excluding mileage), and that the stipend paid to Clerks be raised from \$100 to \$125 per election.

The department is also proposing that a bi-lingual premium be added of \$25 in addition to the stipend. The office believes that adding a bi-lingual premium will encourage more people to become bi-lingual precinct officers, which is required by law and has been difficult to comply with due to lack of volunteers. Currently, all polling places need to have a bi-lingual Spanish precinct officer, and some polling places with higher voter turn

-out should have two bi-lingual Spanish precinct officers. Additionally, there is a need for Cambodian/Khmer, Filipino/Tagalog, and Vietnamese bi-lingual precinct officers.

County Employees Serving as Poll Workers

The proposed changes also include an increase in County employee stipend pay, to offset Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax applied to county employee stipends. FICA is a mandatory payroll tax that funds Social Security and Medicare programs taxed at 7.65% of gross income. Anyone making more than \$1,800 in income from the county must have FICA taken out of their payments, only county employees fit this definition as other precinct officers only work two elections and would not meet the criteria. If the current county stipend is increased, once the FICA tax is applied, the net stipend pay for current county employees will match that of non-county employees serving in the same capacity. If the County employee stipend is not increased, a County employee serving as a Precinct Inspector would receive only \$161.61 of the stipend, as compared to \$175 that a non-County employee would receive. Board of Supervisors Resolutions 94-1512 and 04-0120 authorizes County employees to receive their normal pay while serving as precinct officers.

Category	Notes	Currently	Proposed	Difference
Inspectors	Non-current county employees	135.00	175.00	40.00
Clerks	Non-current county employees	100.00	125.00	25.00
Bi-Lingual in addition to Inspector or Clerk stipend	Non-current county employees	-	25.00	25.00
Inspectors	Current county employees	135.00	189.50	54.50
Clerks	Current county employees	100.00	135.36	35.36
Inspectors with Bi-Lingual	Current county employees	135.00	216.57	81.57
Clerks with Bi-Lingual	Current county employees	100.00	162.43	62.43

Proposed Increase in Polling Place Rental Amount:

Finding accessible and available polling places presents a different problem. For many years, public schools have represented approximately one third of election polling places. Reduced school class size, the closing of schools and safety issues are limiting the availability of these facilities. In addition, many residential developments have no community facilities available, and community halls, clubs, and churches are often reserved for other ongoing or revenue generating activities on Election Day. When community facilities are built or acquired, they are often in close proximity to other public buildings, and not in the outlying neighborhoods, where the polling locations are needed. As a result, the office sometimes doubles - or even triples - the number of precincts that are available in a particular polling place. However, doing so results in voters having to travel out of their own precinct to vote or drop off an absentee ballot. It also increases voter confusion when they enter a polling place, and find 3 identical precincts - however they are legally only allowed to vote at one of them. This is inconvenient and confusing to voters, and also has an impact on the accessibility of the polling place. To comply with the law, a Polling Place Accessibility checklist must be met at every polling place. This checklist consists of 61 questions to determine if a polling place is accessible for disabled voters, including measuring doorways, parking spots, angle of entry into the building, to name a few. Sometimes the office is able to mitigate a polling place with the use of things such as ramps, door wedges, van accessible signs or call boxes. However, increasing the number of precincts in a polling place, and therefore the number of voters, also increases complexity around accessibility.

The office is fortunate that roughly 75% of the polling places are used without compensation (schools, churches and public buildings). Several polling places that have been used as regular polling places over the years have increasingly expressed reluctance to allow the office to continue using them as polling places. By increasing the rate for paid polling places, we will help offset the inconvenience of relocating activities for a day, and some of the cost of offering a facility as a polling place site on Election Day (utilities, janitorial services, etc.).

Polling Place rent was last raised on October 3, 2006 to \$60. The Clerk Recorder Assessor is requesting that the amount paid to a polling location be increased to \$100 per election. It is anticipated that the additional cost of less the \$2,000 per countywide election can be covered by existing appropriations.

Financially, the total estimated cost for the proposed increases is \$32,200: \$1,240 for polling place rental, \$3,175 for the bi-lingual premium, \$700 for the increase to County employee's stipends and \$27,085 for polling place stipend increases for a countywide, county-funded election. The County general fund net increase would be appropriately \$10,650 for General Elections: \$570 for polling place rental, \$1,460 for the bi-lingual premium, \$325 for the increase to County employee's stipends, and \$8,295 for polling place stipend increases. General Elections are heavily consolidated and the consolidating jurisdictions pay a pro-rated share of costs. Primary Elections are almost entirely a county cost. Nearly all other elections conducted by the County, whether scheduled or special, are called by jurisdictions that are responsible for the full costs of conducting those elections and no net County cost increases are anticipated.

Prior Board Actions:

Prior resolutions increasing precinct officer/polling places rates:

4/1/1974 - Resolution 44443 - Inspectors \$20; Clerks/Judges \$18

9/23/1974 - Resolution 46313 - Inspectors \$33; Clerks/Judges \$28.50; Polling Places \$12

1/6/1981 - Resolution 68586 - Inspectors \$45; Clerks/Judges \$40; Polling Places \$20

10/8/1985 - Resolution 85-2225 - Inspectors \$60; Clerks/Judges \$55

7/31/1990 - Resolution 90-1445 - Inspectors \$75; Clerks/Judges \$65

5/11/1999 - Resolution 99-0604 - Inspectors \$100; Clerks/Judges \$75; Polling Places \$40

10/3/2006 - Resolution 06-0863 - Inspectors \$134; Clerks/Judges \$100; Polling Places \$60

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 19-20 Adopted	FY20-21 Projected	FY 21-22 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$32,200	\$10,650	\$32,200
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$32,200	\$10,650	\$32,200
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF		\$10,650	\$32,200
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			

Contingencies	\$32,200		
Total Sources	\$32,200	\$10,650	\$32,200

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

During Primary elections, the county will pick up the majority of the costs, which for FY 2019-20 is estimated to be \$32,200. During General elections, the \$118,450 estimated costs will be shared by the districts on the ballot with approximately \$10,650 being paid by Sonoma County. During FY 2019-20 mid-year estimates, the department will know the number of polling places identified for the March 2020 Presidential Primary election. The department will determine if additional appropriations will be needed, and if so, the department will request a general fund contingency, which is estimated to be \$32,200.

Staffing Impacts:

Position Title (Payroll Classification) Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)
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Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Resolution 2019 precinct officer stipend and polling place rent

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A