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To: Little Hoover Commission
From: James Woodson, Organizing Coordinator at California Calls Education Fund
Re: September 28, 2017 Hearing on Voter Participation in Los Angeles County
Date: September 1, 2017

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the subject of voter participation in Los Angeles County. It is a subject about which we care very deeply and appreciate the invitation to provide our perspective. Included in our written testimony is:

1. Background on the history and work of California Calls
2. A description of our model for engaging new and infrequent voters in the political process
3. Our analysis of the Voters Choice Act (VCA) and its effect on the way new and infrequent voters in Los Angeles County will cast their ballots starting in 2020; and
4. The work we are doing to ensure new and infrequent voters and community-based organizations (CBOs) are included in the formation of the LA County VCA implementation plan;
5. Our recommendations on how LA County can ensure that there is widespread voter participation amongst new and infrequent voters in the county.

We hope this written testimony proves fruitful and beneficial in your analysis of voter participation in Los Angeles County.

Background on California Calls

Founded in 2009, California Calls is a growing, statewide alliance comprised of 30 member organizations organized in 15 local anchor groups across 12 strategic counties of the state: San Diego, San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, Fresno, Tulare, Kern, Santa Clara, San Francisco, and Alameda. Constituencies represented by alliance organizations include low income communities of color, poor and working communities, immigrants, and young people. Alliance organizations employ a broad range of strategies to pursue their work, including grassroots community organizing, leadership development, policy research, direct action, advocacy, and public policy campaigns.

The long-term goal of California Calls is to develop a bottom-up statewide alliance of organizations that qualitatively increases the civic participation and electoral engagement of key disadvantaged communities to have a powerful voice in shaping the public policies that affect their lives. Through its bottom-up approach, California Calls and its anchor groups work to increase the civic participation of residents most underrepresented in California's democracy and most impacted by growing inequality in support of systemic, progressive solutions to our state's problems. As such, California Calls anchor groups have

implemented 14 statewide civic engagement programs since 2009 both during and in-between elections and increased turnout among target new and infrequent voters 10 to 15% above the state voter turnout average.



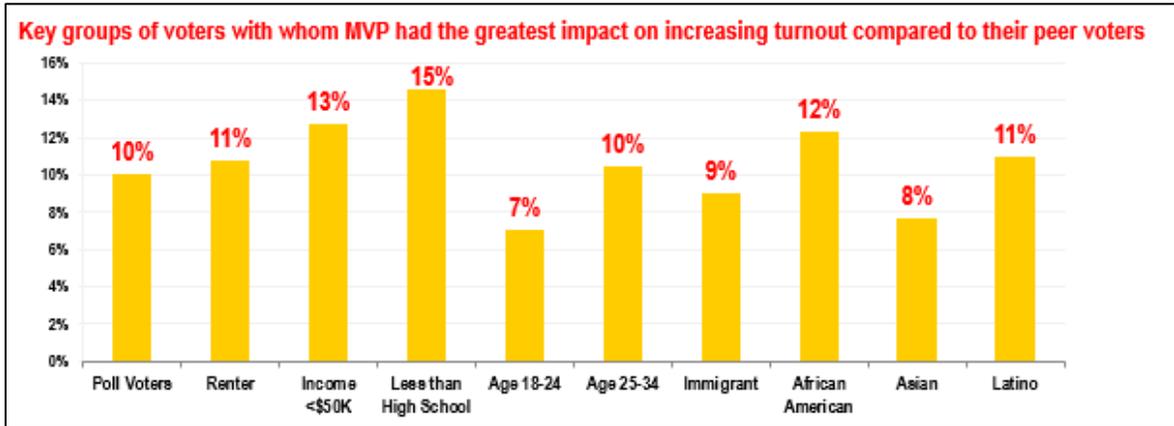
Strategic Collaborations & Partnerships

Since 2015, California Calls has initiated three strategic collaborations and/or partnerships designed to help expand the ecosystem of organizations doing integrated voter engagement (IVE) and expand the electorate to better reflect California’s diversity. Those collaborations consist of: (1) the Million Voters Project, (2) the African American Civic Engagement Project, and (3) the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) IVE Project.

1) **Million Voters Project**

The Million Voters Project (MVP) is a multi-year collaboration with the goal of achieving a strategic change in the composition of the California Electorate to more closely reflect the diversity of its population. The collaboration has started with seven, statewide community-based networks with

Post-election analysis of who voted indicates that 78.5% of voters engaged by MVP turned out to vote compared to the statewide turnout of 73.5%. The turnout comparison to voters targeted by MVP (renters, low income, voters of color, immigrant voters, and young voters) was 7 to 15% higher than their peer voters.

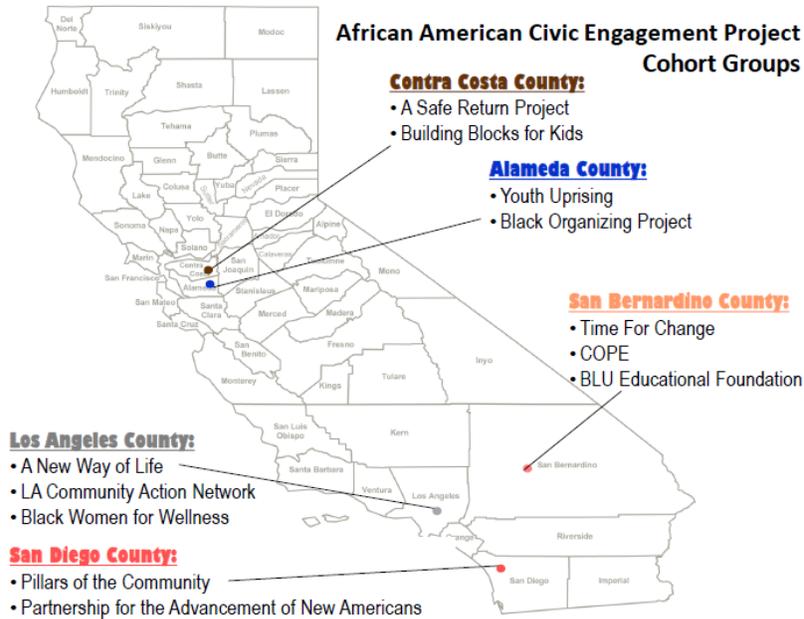


2) African American Civic Engagement Project (AACEP)

The African American Civic Engagement Project is a strategic project housed within California Calls that seeks to strengthen and scale civic participation capacities of African American groups in California to contribute to increasing the voice and power of communities suffering from social and economic inequalities. Utilizing California Calls' extensive experience in training local community groups on integrated voter engagement and its statewide voter engagement infrastructure, the project works across 5 counties in California (San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Alameda, and Contra Costa) with a cohort of 12 Black-led groups who have the readiness and leadership commitment to add and/or scale up integrated voter engagement as a strategic component of their social change work.

In 2016, AACEP cohort organizations:

- Engaged 13,687 individual target voters during the 2016 June Primary through phone banking and door-to-door canvassing;
- Registered 10,838 voters in the three months leading up to the November election;
- Contacted 23,157 new and infrequent voters to motivate them to vote, and identified 15,070 supporters on various priority issues;
- Trained and mobilized over 200 grassroots leaders to participate in voter outreach.



3) Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) Project

The BHC IVE Project is a strategic project sponsored by The California Endowment (TCE) and led by California Calls and PICO California. Based on the growing interest in integrated voter engagement by TCE’s Building Healthy Communities program, six organizations were chosen to receive support with building their voter engagement capacity: Community Water Center, Fathers and Families of San Joaquin, Hmong Innovating Politics, Khmer Girls in Action, Latino Health Access and Mid-City CAN. Working with these groups, California Calls and PICO California will design and implement a multi-year capacity building program. The first civic engagement programs with the BHC Project will launch in the fall of 2017 around issues including youth services, environmental justice, health education and farmworker empowerment.



Our Model: Integrated Voter Engagement

California Calls uses the integrated voter engagement (or IVE) model to increase civic participation in our communities. IVE, which research has shown significantly increases voter turnout, particularly in underrepresented and traditional marginalized communities, employs a variety of integrated strategies to increase civic participation. In short, IVE mixes tactics such as voter outreach, community organizing, policy advocacy, leadership development, direct action, mass mobilization, and direct service to engage voters both in and beyond election cycles. In fact, there are 6 key components to our IVE strategy:

- 1) A multi-year strategy to increase the voter participation of communities and constituencies traditionally underrepresented in electorate;
- 2) Engaging target voters year-round to build a relationship, educate on issues, motivate to increase voter participation, become involved in advocacy and community organizing;
- 3) Local CBOs that are rooted in communities embrace IVE as an integrated part of their organizing strategy & ongoing work;
- 4) Development of Grassroots Leaders in communities as the primary voter engagement organizers;
- 5) Use of voter engagement technology to increase the capacities of CBOs to reach a new scale of engaging target constituencies;
- 6) Systematic tracking of engagement and results through a living and growing voter database.

Impact of IVE on Voter Turnout

For the November 2016 general election, California Calls launched one of the largest field program in the State of California with 31 organizations participating, 15 Get-Out-the-Vote Centers, and touching voters in 21 Counties. A total of 2,030 grassroots leaders engaged in phoning and door knocking over 5.5 weeks. Overall, we contacted a total of 243,317 voters and boosted turnout by the following margins:

- California Calls turned out African American voters 15 points higher and Latino voters 10 points higher than the statewide average for each group of voters;
- California Calls turned out 18- to 24-year old voters 5 points higher than statewide voters of the same age;
- California Calls turned lower income (under \$50K) voters out 14 points higher than low-income voters statewide
- California Calls turned out immigrant voters 11 points higher than immigrant voters Statewide

Voter Participation

Statewide

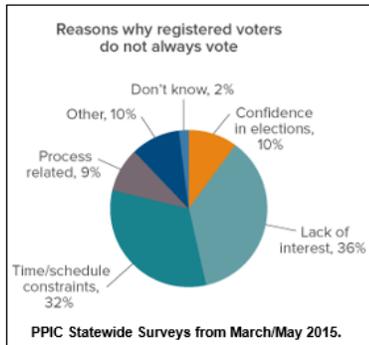
According to the California Secretary of State, during the last election, there were 24,875,293 residents eligible to vote, 19,411,771 who were registered to vote, and 14,610,509 who actually voted (75.27% of registered, 58.74% of eligible). As such, 4,802,262 voters were registered but didn't vote, and 5,463,522 who were eligible but not registered and didn't vote. That means there were 10,265,784 residents who were eligible to vote but didn't. These 10 million residents are overwhelmingly young, persons of color, low income, and/or immigrant voters.

Los Angeles County

In November 2016, 3,445,597 out of 5,289,831 voters cast a ballot, a turnout rate of 65.1%. As expected, voter participation in the June 2016 primary election was significantly lower as 1,988,692 out of 4,980,587 voters cast a ballot, a turnout rate of 40%.

In addition, Los Angeles County saw low voter turnout during its March 7 mayoral election in the City of Los Angeles as well as its countywide election in May. Voter participation in March was less than 20%, while turnout in May was less than 10%.

Why People Don't Vote



According to a study done by the Public Policy Institute of California, the top three reasons registered voters don't vote are: Lack of Interest (36%), Time/Schedule Constraints (32%), and Lack of Confidence in Elections (10%). While there are encouraging public policy efforts to address making the voting process easier and more accessible, these policies would only address 41% of the reasons given by voters for not consistently voting – that is, time/schedule constraints and process related issues. and confidence in elections (lack of trust, cynicism). It is important to note that SB 450 does not address lack of interest, which is, in fact, the biggest driver of low voter turnout, and confidence in elections,

as a [California Voter Experience Survey](#) conducted by Professor Mindy Romero of UC-Davis' California Civic Engagement Project, highlights. According to the survey, "a majority of Californians (61%) do not like the idea of Vote Centers replacing neighborhood polling places." Moreover, vote-by-mail voters and in-person poll voters "share a lack of receptiveness" to the changes SB 450 would implement. 71% of voters who vote in person at traditional polling locations indicated that they do not like the idea of voter centers, while 53% of vote-by-mail voters indicated the same.

Recent Election Reforms

While California has passed and implemented a number of reforms to California's election system, many of which California Calls endorsed and/or supported, major reforms include:

1. AB 1461, the New Motor Voter Program (2016), which enables DMV customers to register to vote when applying for or renewing driver's licenses and state ID cards;
2. AB 1436, which authorized election day voter registration in 2012; and
3. Certification of the VoteCal statewide voter database, which will enable California citizens to more easily register to vote, verify their voter status, find their polling location, pre-register if they are 16- or 17-year-olds.

These reforms, while not silver bullets, will certainly make registering to vote easier and more accessible. They won't necessarily impact voter turnout, especially on their own. However, by far, the most drastic change to California's voting system, and the one that may have the biggest impact on voter turnout, is the passage of SB 450, the California Voter's Choice Act, in 2016.

The Voter's Choice Act (SB 450)

Background

As you know, in September 2016, Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 450, "The Voters Choice Act." Based on the State of Colorado's model of elections and sponsored by California Secretary of State (SOS) Alex Padilla, SB 450 is designed to "modernize California elections" by: 1) improving the voting experience, 2) providing voters more options for when, where, and how they cast a ballot, and 3) saving money in the administration of elections. As such, SB 450 will institute major changes to the voting system in key counties, starting in 2018.

The most significant change centers around the permitting of 14 counties in 2018, and all other counties in 2020, to conduct all mail-in ballot elections – that is, if a county opts in to the new election system, it will be permitted to conduct elections where all voters are mailed a ballot and must return their ballot either: (a) by mail, (b) at a designated drop-off location, or (c) in-person via a vote center starting 10 days prior to the election. This new system would replace traditional polling locations, such that thousands of polling locations across the State of California will disappear.

Our Advocacy

California Calls took a neutral position on SB 450 as it worked its way through the legislative process. While we certainly agreed with the concept of modernizing California's election system and making it easier and more convenient to vote, we had concerns that the basic structure of SB 450 would, in fact, make it more difficult to vote and cause massive voter confusion at the polls. As such, we did not oppose SB 450 but have remained involved in the implementation process to ensure that the needs of new and infrequent voters are addressed both in key counties in which we have a strong presence and throughout the state. Accordingly, California Calls has been appointed to sit on the California Secretary of State's VCA Implementation Task Force, which is charged with assisting in the oversight of SB 450 implementation statewide. California Calls has also recently joined the Voters Choice California (VCC) coalition along with our allies, ACLU, League of Women Voters, NALEO, AAAJ-LA, Advancement Project, and others who are working both locally and statewide to ensure VCA implementation works for all voters, especially those in underrepresented communities.

In addition, California Calls has backed and is continuing to support key legislation that we believe will increase voter participation. Some past provisions we have supported include the Motor Voter law, conditional / same-day voter registration, and pre-registration for 16- and 17-year olds. Currently, we are supporting AB 216, which would require counties to provide paid postage for all vote-by-mail ballots; and AB 918 which would require the availability and accessibility of non-English facsimile ballots and voter information at polling locations, including vote centers.

Our Analysis

Key Benefits: As previously mentioned, California Calls recognizes that there are some benefits to the implementation of SB 450. Such benefits include:

- Voters would now have more opportunities to vote early in-person, up to 11 days prior to elections;
- Voters would have the opportunity to drop off vote-by-mail ballots in close proximity to public transportation up to 29 days prior to elections;
- Voters would have the opportunity to update their voter registration information, register to vote, and receive disability and language assistance at Vote Centers.
- Voters are given more in-person voting options as election day approaches.
- SB 450 requires counties to at least consider data and information such as proximity to public transportation, language minority communities, low-income communities, and unregistered voters in deciding where to locate vote centers.
- Theoretically, poll workers would be better trained and equipped to handle issues as they arise at Vote Centers compared to traditional polling locations.

Overall, we think these provisions should create a better voting experience for some voters, particularly those who vote early or by mail.

Key Concerns: As an alliance, and in our role as a representative of the Million Voters Project, California Calls' priority is to ensure SB 450 implementation meets the needs of new and infrequent voters among young people, low income people, and communities of color. As such, we are concerned that SB 450 implementation may not meet the needs of these voters, for a few reasons, including:

- SB 450, unlike the Colorado election system on which it is based, is an opt-in system in which counties must individually decide whether they participate in the new election system when permitted. This creates a situation where voters in adjacent cities and counties, who may be from the same community, vote under a different election system. We believe that this dynamic has the very real potential of causing mass voter confusion and makes it difficult for counties under both systems to adequately inform and educate voters.
- SB 450 allows counties to eliminate traditional polling locations, at which many voters may have cast ballots for years. Again, we believe this has the potential to cause confusion for voters who may not receive the information that they can no longer cast their ballot at their traditional polling location or they may simply forget.
- SB 450 allows counties to deliver vote-by-mail ballots to voters who did not specifically request a vote-by-mail ballot, again, creating the potential for voter confusion.
- SB 450 creates major changes to the voting system without specific provisions requiring *robust* public education and outreach to inform voters of the changes.
- While specifically addressing the needs of language minority voters and voters with disabilities, SB 450 has no mechanism that requires counties to account for the needs of new and infrequent voters, specifically, (a) voters of color who are not a part of language minority communities, (b) low-income voters, and (c) young people, especially those who are not students.
- SB 450 has minimal requirements for counties to notify voters of the various public participation processes that might allow voters to help shape their county's implementation plan.
- SB 450 allows, and may even encourage, counties to prioritize vote-by-mail ballots, but does not require counties to provide paid postage to voters, causing voters to either have to provide postage themselves or travel to a vote center, all of which can increase the cost of voting and keep low-income voters from casting a ballot.

Our Mitigation Work

Considering our concerns outlined above, California Calls is planning and currently doing the following things to ensure those concerns are mitigated:

- *Tracking the Landscape:* Through our role on the Secretary of State's VCA Task Force, California Calls continues to track the landscape of SB 450 implementation and ensure that the best practices we've learned from engaging new and infrequent voters are heard and incorporated in local election administration plans, including that of Los Angeles County.
- *Local Implementation:* California Calls and our Million Voters Project partners are activating our local affiliates where appropriate to get involved in the implementation process. This work includes SB 450 background briefings with our affiliates, encouraging them to join local VCC hubs to stay informed about the local implementation plans, and updating them on any new information we receive on SB 450 implementation.
- *Liaising with the Los Angeles County Registrar's Office:* Along with our allies, California Calls has begun conversations with the Los Angeles County Registrar's Office to ensure coordination between the Registrar's Office and community-based organizations and to ensure the Registrar's Office has all of the information it needs to make smart decisions as it creates the LA County

election administration plan, particularly as it relates to new and infrequent voters throughout the County.

- *Voters Choice California*: California Calls has recently joined both the statewide VCC coalition and the Los Angeles local hub to ensure the needs of new and infrequent voters are heard and centered in local advocacy for robust and comprehensive public participation, outreach, and education plans here in LA County.

Our Recommendations

Considering the growing diversity of the state's population and the low rates of voter participation in LA County, coupled with the increased cost of living in the State of California, we believe it's more important than ever to prioritize engagement of new infrequent voters in election reforms like SB 450. New and infrequent voters are paramount to the state's stated goal of increasing voter participation in the state. As such, based on our research and our experience working directly with this important voter population, we believe that SB 450 implementation must include the following:

- **Robust Public Outreach and Education**: SB 450 should be viewed as a floor, not a ceiling. As such, Los Angeles County should go above and beyond the provisions of the bill as it relates to:
 - *Required Mail Notices*: The County should send voters more than the required 2 mail notices;
 - *Outreach and Education*: The County should ensure outreach and education methods are specifically tailored to new and infrequent voter communities (including partnerships and collaborations with community-based organizations that work with new and infrequent voters).
- **An Authentic Public Participation Process**: Public participation processes – including public consultations, public comment periods, and public hearings – should be authentic and have teeth. The County should prioritize collaboration with community groups that work with new and infrequent voters at every step to ensure new and infrequent voters are a key stakeholder and that new and infrequent voters have a significant voice in the implementation process. The County should collaborate with advocates of new and infrequent voters to develop an election administration plan rather than simply informing the public of decisions it has already made. In addition, the County should establish specific advisory committees for African American voters, low- and no- income voters, and young voters (or, at the very least, create one large advisory committee for all of the above).
- **Accessible Voting Apparatus**: Voting should be made easy, convenient, and accessible to all voters throughout LA County:
 - California Calls joins with our allies at NALEO and AAAJ-LA in the call for robust voter education and outreach (including in-language voting materials) to ensure language accessibility.
 - The County should provide paid postage for all vote-by-mail ballots.
 - The County should prioritize proximity to public transportation in considering where to locate vote centers and dropboxes.
 - The County should provide robust staffing and equipment (above and beyond any requirements in the bill language) to avoid long lines at vote centers, particularly as election day approaches.
- **Full Funding for Implementation**: Lastly, California Calls believes that significant resources will be needed to implement SB 450 throughout the state, and especially in Los Angeles County. Major changes to the way in which California residents vote requires major investment in outreach and

education to ensure all voters are fully informed of those changes. Therefore, we call on the Board of Supervisors and the County Registrar to fully fund a robust and comprehensive election administration and outreach/education plan, including adequate resources for public education, postage and mailings, and vote centers and equipment.

Lastly, we'd like to note that while we believe SB 450 can be a step in the right direction to full participation of California's electorate if implemented robustly and comprehensively, ultimately, SB 450 is not a silver bullet. Accordingly, California should continue to work to improve our election system and make it easier and more accessible for voters of all races, incomes, and classes to cast a ballot.

Thank you for your time!