



COUNTY OF FRESNO VOTERS CHOICE ACT | FAQ

What is the Voter's Choice Act?

California lawmakers approved Senate Bill 450, the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA), in 2016. The VCA expands voters' options for how, when and where they cast their ballots. The VCA is an optional law that allows counties to decide if they will transition into the new voting model.

Why the change?

State policymakers and election officials hope to increase voter participation by providing voters with increased flexibility to vote when and where is most convenient for them. For example, voters in participating counties will be able to vote on weekends, at any Vote Center in their county and by mail without requesting a mailed ballot in advance. The new process also modernizes California's elections and recognizes the growing preference voters have for mailed ballots. Overall, the Voter's Choice Act gives voters more options so they can choose when, where and how they vote.

Is my county switching to the Voter's Choice Act?

Fresno County's Board of Supervisors approved switching to the VCA model for the March 2020 Presidential Primary. In 2020, fourteen other counties will conduct VCA elections: Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Tuolumne.

What is the timeline for implementation of the Voter's Choice Act?

Throughout the summer and fall of 2019, Fresno County held public meetings to receive input on their Election Administration Plan (EAP), published a draft EAP and posted the draft EAP for public comment. The County formed three public advisory committees: a Language Accessibility Advisory Committee, a Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee and an overall Voters Choice Act Advisory Committee. These committees have met regularly and provided valuable input into the plan.

The EAP was submitted to the California Secretary of State for approval on September 24, 2019. Fresno County's EAP can be viewed here: <https://www.co.fresno.ca.us/departments/county-clerk-registrar-of-voters/voters-choice-act-3528>.

How will the new voting process work?

29 days before the election, all registered voters in Fresno County will be mailed a vote-by-mail ballot. Voters will have three options to return their mail ballot:

- Return their ballot by mail postage-free, postmarked no later than Election Day
- Place their ballot in one of the secure drop boxes located throughout Fresno County
- Vote in person at one of the Vote Centers throughout Fresno County



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Vote Centers—which will replace polling places—offer many services and greater flexibility because you can visit any Vote Center in your county. At a Vote Center, you can drop off your ballot; request a replacement ballot and vote in person; and you may also register to vote and cast a ballot the same day. Additionally, Vote Centers will rely on professional staff who will be trained to support all voters, including those with disabilities and those who may need language assistance. All 50 Vote Centers will be open four days from the Saturday before Election Day through Election Day at 8 p.m. In addition, ten Vote Centers will be open a full 11 days, including the two weekends before Election Day.

For more information on Fresno County’s Vote Center locations and operating hours, please visit VoteFresnoCounty.com.

Will Vote Centers be open on the weekends?

Yes. All Vote Centers will be open the weekend before Election Day, and ten will be open for two weekends. If a holiday falls in the ten days before Election Day, Vote Centers will be open on that Holiday. Vote Centers will be open eight hours per day prior to Election Day and 13 hours on Election Day.

What if I lose my ballot or make a mistake?

You may call the Elections Department at (559) 600-VOTE (8683) or visit the Elections Department Office at 2221 Kern St. in Fresno to request a replacement ballot at any time. On the ten days prior to Election Day and on Election Day, you can visit any open Vote Center in Fresno County and request a replacement ballot in person.

Can I vote at any Vote Center?

Eligible voters may use any Vote Center in Fresno County. They may also use any drop box in the county.

Why can't we use my polling place?

In some cases, former polling places will be used as Vote Centers. However, many former polling places will no longer be in use. Vote Centers under the VCA must be available for 4 to 11 day requirements. Many traditional polling places may not be available, accessible or meet other requirements under the VCA. A voter may vote at any Vote Center in Fresno County.

What if I've moved since the last time I registered to vote?

You might not receive a ballot in the mail, but you may still vote. Check your registration status and information at VoteFresnoCounty.com. You may update your information online, in person at the Elections Department office or by visiting any Vote Center in Fresno County. Call (559) 600-VOTE (8683) for more information.



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What if I'm not registered to vote?

You will not receive a ballot in the mail, but if you are eligible to vote, you may still do so. Visit any Vote Center in Fresno County and you will be able to register and vote the same day. For more information on Vote Center locations, please visit VoteFresnoCounty.com.

Who decides where the new Vote Centers and drop boxes will be placed? Which criteria will be used?

The Elections Department, in consultation with several stakeholder advisory committees, decided where to place Vote Centers and drop boxes based on 14 criteria outlined in state law. These include considering where the population lives, access to public transit and parking, how frequently a community votes by mail, and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Will Vote Centers be accessible to people with disabilities?

Yes, all Vote Centers will be accessible to people with disabilities. The Elections Department established a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). A VAAC is comprised of voters with disabilities and advocates for voters with disabilities. The VAAC's feedback is integral to the planning process to make voting accessible in the transition from polling places to the Vote Center model. Please contact us at Clerk-Elections@fresnocountyca.gov or (559) 600-VOTE (8683) if you are interested in joining the ongoing efforts of the VAAC.

What about voters who speak languages other than English? Will they be able to use the Vote Centers?

Yes, Vote Centers will accommodate voters with limited English proficiency. Vote Centers will have well-trained staff at every location prepared to support voters with translated voting materials in languages required by law. To the greatest extent possible, the county will aim to have multilingual staff and volunteers available to help voters at Vote Centers. The Elections Department's Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) is comprised of bilingual voters and advocates for bilingual voters. Please contact us at Clerk-Elections@fresnocountyca.gov or (559) 600-VOTE (8683) if you are interested in joining the ongoing efforts of the LAAC.

I don't have a car. How will I get to a Vote Center?

The Voter's Choice Act encourages Vote Centers to be accessible by public transit. Throughout Fresno County, free public transportation to Vote Centers will be provided for the four-day period. That includes the cities of Fresno and Clovis and rural parts of Fresno County, including FAX, Handy Ride, Clovis Transit and Fresno County Rural Transit Agency.

Additionally, all voters have the options of returning their ballots by mail or in drop boxes located throughout Fresno County.



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Are there going to be long lines at the Vote Centers?

Because this is a new system, the answer is not certain. Lines at Vote Centers are not expected in the days prior to the Election. In fact, there may be shorter waits than at current polling places because voting will be spread over many more days. Also, new features of Vote Centers will speed up the process. For example, counties will use computers to check people in instead of paper registration rolls. However, voters should be encouraged to not wait until the last day to vote as this could cause lines. If voters wait until Election Day to visit a Vote Center, they should expect longer lines than were common at polling places in the past.

Will I need to show photo identification at the Vote Center?

California voters are not required to show identification at their polling place. However, if you are a newly registered voter, who has not provided either a driver's license or last four digits of your social security number at the time of registration, you may be asked to show identification the first time you vote per federal law. Acceptable forms of identification include a copy of a recent utility bill, the County Voter Information Guide you received from Fresno County or another document sent to you by a government agency. Other examples include your passport, driver's license, official California identification card or student identification card. For more information on identification to use when you vote for the first time, call the Secretary of State's toll-free voter hotline at (800) 345-VOTE (8683).

Please note that every individual has the right to cast a provisional ballot even if he or she does not provide documentation.

Will this make it harder for me to vote in-person?

Some voters will have to travel farther than in previous elections to reach a Vote Center where they can vote in person. However, most voters in the Fresno/Clovis metropolitan area will live within two miles of a Vote Center. A Vote Center will be located in rural incorporated cities and some unincorporated communities. In many other respects, the law makes it easier to vote:

- You get to choose when you vote. Vote Centers will be open four to 11 days, including on the weekends.
- You can vote at any Vote Center in Fresno County, which means you can vote where you work, where you go to school or where you run errands.
- You will be supported by well-trained professional staff.
- You can register to vote or update your registration at a Vote Center.
- You will automatically receive a vote-by-mail ballot and vote it anytime in the month before the election.



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Why will I be mailed a vote-by-mail ballot when I didn't ask for one?

State lawmakers designed the Voter's Choice Act to increase voter turnout and make voting more convenient. One convenience for voters in participating counties is no longer needing to request a vote-by-mail ballot. If you don't want to vote-by-mail, you may visit a Vote Center and ask to vote in person.

How does the Elections Department verify that vote-by-mail ballots are submitted by the registered voter?

Every vote-by-mail ballot returned to the Fresno County Elections Department goes through a rigorous signature review process. The signature on every returned ballot envelope is captured electronically. That signature is compared to the signature on the voter's registration card. After the electronic comparison, election staff may further compare the voter ballot signature to the signature on file. Only after this thorough verification process will the ballot be removed from the envelope and counted. If the signature on the envelope cannot be verified or if there is no signature on the envelope, the Election Department will send a written notification to the registered voter, giving the voter the opportunity to come to the Elections Department and sign the envelope.

What is a drop box?

A drop box is a secure steel, locked structure where voters may deliver their ballots from the time they receive them by mail up to 8 p.m. on Election Day. Election officials will place drop boxes in convenient, accessible locations, including places close to public transportation routes.

Will the drop boxes be secure?

Yes. Drop boxes must be secure and locked. Election officials will retrieve ballots from the drop boxes on a regular basis during the voting period.

Who made the decision to switch to this new process?

State legislators and the Secretary of State designed the Voter's Choice Act with extensive input from community groups that represented a wide range of California voters. The law provided 14 counties the opportunity to try out the VCA in 2018 and allows any county to implement the VCA in 2020. The Fresno County Board of Supervisors approved the implementation of the new model and the county's Elections Department is required to involve the public in deciding the details of how to implement the new law, such as where drop boxes and Vote Centers should be located.

Will the Voter's Choice Act cost taxpayers more money?

Some counties will need additional resources to purchase new equipment necessary to participate in the Voter's Choice Act, such as secure drop boxes. Over time, counties should save some money because they will need to purchase and maintain fewer voting machines.



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Is this an attempt to disenfranchise voters?

No. In fact, the VCA may increase voter turnout. The law is modeled after a similar program in Colorado. When Colorado made the switch, voter turnout increased significantly. Lawmakers hope California will have a similar outcome. Still, it is very important that elections officials and community organizations ensure voters know about the new system.

Could this make it easier for people to commit voter fraud?

No. The Voter's Choice Act vastly improves protections against potential voter fraud:

- When a voter uses a Vote Center, county officials will verify in the statewide voter database that no other votes have been cast by that voter.
- The VCA nearly eliminates the need for provisional ballots, which also enhances security.
- Vote-by-mail ballots also require voter signatures which must match official records, and the use of vote-by-mail will increase.
- Vote Centers will be staffed by trained professionals with strong knowledge of the law and proper voting procedures.
- The Voter's Choice Act requires the use of new voting equipment with enhanced security standards.

How might the Voter's Choice Act affect political campaigns?

The Voter's Choice Act may improve the capacity of campaigns to target and track voters:

- All voters will receive vote-by-mail ballots at the same time, enabling greater predictability and consistency in campaign calendars.
- Campaigns will no longer be reliant upon polling place street indexes for vote information; the County will provide a new, simpler, process for learning who has cast their ballot.
- With fewer sites reporting and few provisional ballots, participating counties should be able to provide election results more quickly.