

The State of Texas



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Secretary of State

Report to the 85th Legislature Under Section 43.007(j), Texas Election Code **Relating to the Countywide Polling Place Program**

Brief Overview

This report is submitted in accordance with Section 43.007(j) of the Texas Election Code, ("the Code") which requires the Secretary of State to file a report with the Texas Legislature no later than the first day of each odd-numbered year regarding specific complaints or concerns filed with the office of the Secretary of State related to counties participating in the countywide election day polling places program ("Program") for the 2015/2016 election year cycle. Under the Program, counties were eligible to apply to use countywide voting locations (also known as "super precincts" or "vote centers") for elections held on the November 2015 and 2016 uniform election dates, the March 2016 primary election and May 2016 runoff primary election and elections held countywide on the May uniform election date, instead of providing polling places at each regular county election precinct. Participation in the Program is limited to those counties that exclusively use direct recording electronic ("DRE") voting systems and provide a computerized and linked voter registration list at each countywide polling place.

Background

House Bill 758 was enacted by the 79th Texas Legislature and required the Secretary of State to establish a pilot program in one or more counties as a test of the countywide voting location concept. Lubbock County was the only county to participate, successfully running a countywide polling place pilot for the November 2006 General Election for State and County Officers.

In the next regular legislative session, the 80th Texas Legislature enacted House Bill 3105, authorizing another pilot program for the 2008 election year. The pilot was limited to elections held countywide on the May uniform election date and the November 4, 2008 General Election for State and County Officers, excluding the March and April 2008 Primary Elections. House Bill 3105 contained a number of changes from the previous legislation. Specifically, it added language requiring the county to adopt a methodology for determining its polling place locations and limited participating counties to reducing the total number of polling places to no more than fifty percent of the number of precinct polling places that would normally be used in the county. Only Lubbock and Erath Counties participated in the House Bill 3105 program.

House Bill 719 was enacted by the 81st Texas Legislature, and it made the pilot program permanent. It added language requiring a county to retain 65 percent of the number of precinct polling places that would normally have been used in its elections in the county's first election using countywide polling places. Additionally, House Bill 719 limited the Secretary of State to choosing three counties with a population of 100,000 or more and two counties with a population of less than 100,000 for each election under the pilot program (House Bill 2194, enacted in the 82nd Legislature, increased the number of counties in the Program to six counties with

populations of 100,000 or more and four counties with populations of less than 100,000). Finally, House Bill 719 required the Secretary of State to continue the countywide election day polling places program for the 2009/2010 election cycle. Under the Program, counties were eligible to apply to use countywide voting locations (also known as "super precincts" or "vote centers") for elections held on the November 2009 and 2010 uniform election dates and for elections held countywide on the May uniform election date, instead of providing polling places at each regular county election precinct. Participation in the Program was limited to those counties that exclusively used direct recording electronic ("DRE") voting systems and provided a computerized and linked voter registration list at each countywide polling place.

Four counties were selected for the November 3, 2009 uniform election date: Collin, Erath, Galveston, and Lubbock Counties. Four counties were selected for the November 2, 2010 General Election for State and County Officers: Collin, Erath, Lubbock and Madison Counties. Each county was required to file a report with the Secretary of State regarding the implementation in their county, and all the county reports will be available on the Secretary of State website.

Senate Bill 578 was enacted by the 83rd Texas Legislature, and expanded the program for use in each primary election and runoff primary election if the county chair or county executive for each political party participating in a joint primary election under Section 172.126 of the Texas Election Code agreed to the use of countywide polling places; or the county chair or county executive committee of each political party required to nominate candidates by primary election agreed to the use of the same countywide polling places.

“Successful” Countywide Precinct Program

House Bill 2194, enacted by the 82nd Texas Legislature, created a new process for counties that have used the countywide election precinct method of voting. Prior law required counties to apply to use countywide election precincts election-by-election. The change added Section 43.007(k) (2) to the Code to allow counties to move forward in using countywide election precincts without approval from the Secretary of State.

To date, forty-two Texas counties applied for and met the Secretary of State’s requirements for the “successful” countywide precinct polling place designation. They include: Aransas County, Brazoria County, Brazos County, Callahan County, Collin County, Coryell County, Eastland County, Ector County, Erath County, Floyd County, Fort Bend County, Gaines County, Galveston County, Grayson County, Hood County, Hopkins County, Jefferson County, Lampasas County, Lee County, Lubbock County, Madison County, McLennan County, Medina County, Midland County, Milam County, Montague County, Navarro County, Palo Pinto County, Parker County, Potter County, Randall County, Rusk County, San Jacinto County, Smith County, Swisher County, Taylor County, Tom Green County, Travis County, Victoria County, Wharton County, Williamson County, and Young County.

Implementation of Current Program

Two counties were selected for the May 9, 2015 uniform election date: Brazoria County and Tom Green County. Ten counties were selected for the November 3, 2015 uniform election date: Brazos County, Ector County, Fort Bend County, Parker County, Potter County, Smith County, Aransas County, Hood County, Hopkins County and Milam County. Four counties

were selected for the March 1, 2016 primary election date: Lee County, Palo Pinto County, San Jacinto County and Young County. One county was selected for the May 24, 2016 runoff primary election: Medina County. Three counties were selected for the November 8, 2016 general election: Nueces County, Grimes County and Throckmorton County. Each of these counties was required to file a report with the Office of the Secretary of State regarding the implementation of their countywide polling locations.

Countywide Precinct Polling Place Program Participants

BRAZORIA COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Brazoria County's population is 313,166.

May 9, 2015

Brazoria County's initial election under the program was the May 9, 2015 uniform election date. Prior to participating in the program, Brazoria County had 29 county election polling places. For the May 9, 2015 uniform election date, the county opted to maintain those 29 county election polling places as countywide election day polling places.

Turnout Trends

Brazoria County used 29 vote centers on election day for the May 9, 2015 uniform election date. An analysis of turnout trends for the May uniform election date in 2014 and 2015 points to a very slight increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 2.14% turnout of registered voters for 2014, compared to 2.41% in 2015 for the May uniform election date.

Public Feedback

After the election, the county solicited feedback from county officials and contracting entities. Support for the county's implementation of the program was largely supported by these groups. No major issues were reported on the county's use of the program for the May 9, 2015 uniform election date.

Brazoria County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on August 4, 2015.

TOM GREEN COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Tom Green County's population is 110,224.

May 9, 2015

Tom Green County's initial election under the program was the November 4, 2014 General Election. Tom Green County's second election under the program was the May 9, 2015 uniform election date. Prior to participating in the program, Tom Green County had 18 county election polling places. For the May 9, 2015 uniform election date, the county opted to maintain those county election polling places and add one additional location for a total of 19 countywide election day polling places.

Turnout Trends

Tom Green County used 19 vote centers on election day for the May 9, 2015 uniform election date. An analysis of turnout trends for the May uniform election date in 2014 and 2015 points to a significant increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 4.47% turnout of registered voters for 2014, compared to 9.41% in 2015 for the May uniform election date.

Public Feedback

After the election, the county solicited feedback from county officials as well as special interests groups, the county political parties, poll workers and contracting entities. The feedback from all of these groups was positive and supported the implementation of the countywide program in the county. No major issues were reported on the county's use of the program for the May 9, 2015 uniform election date.

Tom Green County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on August 19, 2015.

BRAZOS COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Brazos County's population is 194,851.

November 3, 2015

Brazos County's initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Brazos County had 36 county election polling places. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county used 26 countywide election day polling places.

Turnout Trends

Brazos County used 26 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of turnout trends for constitutional elections in 2013 and 2015 points to a very slight increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 7.86% turnout of registered voters for 2013, compared to 8.08% in 2015 for the Constitutional Amendment Election.

Public Feedback

After the election, the county solicited feedback from county election officials and poll workers on the institution of the program in the county. The election report contains copies of surveys that were sent to the county poll workers asking them to identify any voter feedback on the program or possible improvements to the program. Voter feedback as indicated in the survey returns showed overall support for the countywide vote centers citing that it increased voter convenience while decreasing voter confusion regarding where to vote. No major issues were reported on the county's use of the program for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election.

Brazos County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on January 4, 2016.

ECTOR COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Ector County’s population is 137,130.

November 3, 2015

Ector County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Ector County had 22 polling places. For the November 5, 2013 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county used 25 countywide election day polling places.

Turnout Trends

Ector County used 25 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Ector County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows a decrease in turnout. Reports indicate a 11.14% turnout of registered voters for 2013, compared to a 7.85% turnout in 2015 for the Constitutional Amendment Election.

Public Feedback

Ector County requested feedback from voters via a survey as voters left the polling place on election day. The response to the use of the program was largely positive with voters stating they preferred the ease and convenience of voting at any countywide location.

Ector County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on February 16, 2016.

FORT BEND COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Fort Bend County’s population is 585,375.

November 3, 2015

Fort Bend County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. In the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2013, the county used 81 county election polling places. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county used 61 countywide election day polling places.

Turnout Trends

Fort Bend County used 61 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Fort Bend County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows a large increase in voter totals over those years.

Reports indicate a 8.68% turnout of registered voters for 2013, compared to a 13.36% turnout in 2015 for the Constitutional Amendment Election.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Fort Bend County solicited feedback from voters via a survey as voters left the polling place on election day. The response to the use of the program was largely positive with voters stating the program made it more convenient to vote and they experienced less wait times.

Fort Bend County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on January 28, 2016.

PARKER COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Parker County’s population is 116,927.

November 3, 2015

Parker County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Parker County had 42 polling places. For the November 5, 2013 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county used 41 election day polling places as countywide election day polling places.

Turnout Trends

Parker County used 41 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Parker County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows an increase in voter totals over those years. Reports indicate a 7.19% turnout of registered voters for 2013, compared to a 8.17% turnout in 2015 for the Constitutional Amendment Election.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Parker County solicited feedback from voters via a survey as voters left the polling place on election day. The county also solicited feedback from contracting political subdivisions within the county. The response to the use of the program was largely positive with voters stating they were in favor of the program and would like to see the county continue to use it. Of the surveys that were marked unfavorably, no reasons were given as to why the program was not favored. The response from the contracting political subdivisions expressed support for the program, citing voter convenience as the major reason for that support.

POTTER COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Potter County’s population is 121,073.

November 3, 2015

Potter County's initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Potter County used 24 precinct polling places in the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2013. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county used 16 polling places.

Turnout Trends

Potter County used 16 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Potter County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows a significant increase in voter turnout totals over those years. Reports indicate an 11.2% turnout for registered voters in 2013, compared to an 18.21% turnout for registered voters in 2015.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Potter County solicited feedback from voters via a survey as voters left the polling place on election day. The response to the use of the program was largely positive with voters stating they were in favor of the program due to the convenience of having a choice of where to vote on election day. Of the negative responses to the survey, the most commonly cited reason against the program was the closing of some usual election day polling places.

Potter County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on January 6, 2016.

SMITH COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Smith County's population is 209,714.

November 3, 2015

Smith County's initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. The county used 34 polling places in the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2013. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county elected to continue to use 34 polling places.

Turnout Trends

Smith County used 34 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Smith County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows an increase in voter totals over those years. Reports indicate a 5.28% turnout for registered voters in 2013, compared to a 7.18% turnout for registered voters in 2015.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Smith County solicited feedback from voters via a survey as voters left the polling place on election day. The county also solicited feedback from contracting political subdivisions within the county. The response to the use of the program was largely positive with

voters stating they found the program made it much more convenient for them to vote. Of the surveys that were marked unfavorably, voters cited unfamiliarity with the locations of the polling places and lack of signage.

Smith County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on December 17, 2015.

ARANSAS COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Aransas County’s population is 23,158.

November 3, 2015

Aransas County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Aransas County had 6 voting precincts. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county utilized 4 countywide polling places.

Turnout Trends

Aransas County used 4 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Aransas County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows a significant increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 6.26% turnout for registered voters in 2013, compared with a 11.57% turnout for registered voters in 2015.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Aransas County solicited feedback from poll workers regarding the implementation of the program and suggestions for improvement. The county also provided journals at each polling location so that voters could provide feedback. Voter feedback concerning the county’s use of the program was largely positive. The county did receive some negative feedback regarding signage directing voters to the polling locations.

Aransas County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on January 5, 2016.

HOOD COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Hood County’s population is 51,182.

November 3, 2015

Hood County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Hood County had 15 voting precincts. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county utilized 10 countywide polling places.

Turnout Trends

Hood County used 10 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Hood County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows a significant decrease in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 21.44% turnout for registered voters in 2013, compared to a 17.96% turnout for registered voters in 2015. The county attributes the decrease to the fact that there was a school bond election and a highly contested city council race on the ballot in 2013 in addition to the constitutional amendment election.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Hood County solicited feedback from election workers and voters on the impact of the program in the Constitutional Amendment Election. The county received positive feedback from all groups. Many individuals highlighted the fact that the program served voter convenience by allowing voters to vote at any polling place.

Hood County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on December 16, 2015.

HOPKINS COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Hopkins County’s population is 35,161.

November 3, 2015

Hopkins County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Hopkins County had 21 voting precincts. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county utilized 14 countywide polling places.

Turnout Trends

Hopkins County used 14 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Hopkins County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows a very slight increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate an 11.37% turnout for registered voters in 2013, compared to an 11.79% turnout for registered voters in 2015.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Hopkins County solicited feedback from poll workers and conducted a survey of voters regarding the county’s use of the countywide polling place program. Feedback towards the program was largely positive with voters informing the county that they found the countywide program more convenient and polling locations were easy to find. The poll workers also indicated they felt the program was more convenient for the voters and was a cost saving measure for the county.

Hopkins County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on December 17, 2015.

MILAM COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Milam County’s population is 24,757.

November 3, 2015

Milam County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Milam County had 11 voting precincts. For the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election, the county utilized 8 countywide polling places.

Turnout Trends

Milam County used 8 vote centers on election day for the November 3, 2015 Constitutional Amendment Election. An analysis of Milam County turnout trends for constitutional amendment elections in 2013 and 2015 shows an increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate an 7.00% turnout for registered voters in 2013, compared to an 10.00% turnout for registered voters in 2015.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Milam County solicited feedback from voters via a survey as voters left the polling place on election day. Response to the program was largely favorable. In addition the county contact special interest groups and the political parties and received a favorable response to the program from those groups as well.

Milam County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on January 4, 2016.

LEE COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Lee County’s population is 16,612.

March 1, 2016

Lee County’s initial election under the program was the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. Prior to participating in the program, Lee County had 15 voting precincts. For the March 1, 2016 Primary Election, the county used 10 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Lee County used 10 vote centers on election day for the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2014 and 2016 Primary Elections in Lee County shows an overall significant increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 16.27% turnout for registered voters in 2014, compared to a 28.45% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

Lee County solicited feedback from voters on the county's use of the countywide polling place program via a survey that was provided to voters at the polling locations. The responses received were largely positive. Many voters indicated they found the countywide program to be more convenient and that they would like to see the county continue to use the program in future elections.

Lee County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on April 28, 2016.

PALO PINTO COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Palo Pinto County's population is 28,111.

March 1, 2016

Palo Pinto County's initial election under the program was the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. Prior to participating in the program, Palo Pinto County had 17 voting precincts. For the March 1, 2016 Primary Election, the county used 13 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Palo Pinto County used 13 vote centers on election day for the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 Primary Elections in Palo Pinto County shows an overall significant increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 27% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 41.53% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

Palo Pinto County solicited feedback from voters on the county's use of the countywide polling place program via a survey that was provided to voters at the polling locations. The responses received were largely positive. Results from the survey indicated that most voters found the program to be convenient and the polling locations easy to find. Most voters surveyed also indicated that they would like to see the county to continue to use the program for future elections.

Palo Pinto County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on July 26, 2016.

SAN JACINTO COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, San Jacinto County's population is 26,384.

March 1, 2016

San Jacinto County's initial election under the program was the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. Prior to participating in the program, San Jacinto County had 11 voting precincts. For the March 1, 2016 Primary Election, the county used 10 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

San Jacinto County used 10 vote centers on election day for the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 Primary Elections in San Jacinto County shows an overall significant increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 34.96% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 59.32% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

San Jacinto County solicited feedback from voters on the county's use of the countywide polling place program via a survey that was provided to voters at the polling locations. The responses received were largely positive with most of the voters stating that they liked the countywide program concept and that they would like to see the county continue to use the program for future elections.

San Jacinto County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on April 5, 2016.

YOUNG COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Young County's population is 18,550.

March 1, 2016

Young County's initial election under the program was the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. Prior to participating in the program, Young County had 9 voting precincts. For the March 1, 2016 Primary Election, the county used 6 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Young County used 6 vote centers on election day for the March 1, 2016 Primary Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 Primary Elections in Young County shows an overall significant increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 26.00% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 39.39% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

Young County solicited feedback from voters on the county's use of the countywide polling place program via a survey that was provided to voters at the polling locations. The responses received were largely positive. Most of the voters surveyed reported that they liked the countywide program concept. Most of the voters surveyed also reported that they would like to see the county continue to use the program for future elections.

Young County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on April 18, 2016.

MEDINA COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Medina County's population is 46,006.

May 24, 2016

Medina County's initial election under the program was the May 24, 2016 Primary Runoff Election. Prior to participating in the program, Medina County had 12 voting precincts. For the May 24, 2016 Primary Runoff Election, the county used 8 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Medina County used 8 vote centers on election day for the May 24, 2016 Primary Runoff Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 Primary Runoff Elections in Medina County shows a significant decrease in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 12.71% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 3.82% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Medina County solicited feedback on the county's use of the program from county officials and the general public via a public meeting of the county commissioners court. There was no opposition to the county's use of the program at that meeting.

Medina County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on October 25, 2016.

NUECES COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Nueces County's population is 340,223.

November 8, 2016

Nueces County's initial election under the program was the November 8, 2016 General Election. Prior to participating in the program, Nueces County had 127 voting precincts. For the November 8, 2016 General Election, the county used 91 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Nueces County used 91 vote centers on election day for the November 8, 2016 General Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 General Elections in Nueces County shows an increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 50.92% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 53.82% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

At the time of this report, no specific feedback was provided to the Office of the Secretary of State regarding the implementation of the program in Nueces County. However, no complaints

or negative feedback was received by the Office of the Secretary of State regarding the county's implementation of the program.

GRIMES COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Grimes County's population is 26,604.

November 8, 2016

Grimes County's initial election under the program was the November 8, 2016 General Election. Prior to participating in the program, Grimes County had 14 voting precincts. For the November 8, 2016 General Election, the county used 14 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Grimes County used 14 vote centers on election day for the November 8, 2016 General Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 General Elections in Grimes County shows an increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 60.72% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 62.79% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

At the time of this report, no specific feedback was provided to the Office of the Secretary of State regarding the implementation of the program in Grimes County. However, no complaints or negative feedback was received by the Office of the Secretary of State regarding the county's implementation of the program.

THROCKMORTON COUNTY

According to the 2010 Census, Throckmorton County's population is 1,641.

November 8, 2016

Throckmorton County's initial election under the program was the November 8, 2016 General Election. Prior to participating in the program, Throckmorton County had 5 voting precincts. For the November 8, 2016 General Election, the county used 4 vote centers.

Turnout Trends

Throckmorton County used 4 vote centers on election day for the November 8, 2016 General Election. An analysis of turnout trends for the 2012 and 2016 General Elections in Throckmorton County shows an increase in voter turnout over those years. Reports indicate a 60.73% turnout for registered voters in 2012, compared to a 67.12% turnout for registered voters in 2016.

Public Feedback

Following the election, Throckmorton County solicited feedback from county officials, pollworkers and voters on the county's implementation of the program. All of the feedback that

the counties received from these groups was positive and the county receive no complaints on the program.

Recommendations to the 85th Texas Legislature

After twelve years of the countywide polling place program, the countywide polling place program continues to grow and continues to be successful for the counties that implement the program. For the November 2016 general election, 45 counties participated in the program including the 42 counties that had previously been designated “successful”. This accounts for just over 17% of the counties in the state.

First Recommendation

Many of the participating counties expressed concern with the selection of election day judges and clerks at the countywide polling places. The elimination of voting precinct specific polling places under the program and the moving of polling places to other locations or combining previous precincts often does not allow a county to make a specific designation of judges and clerks from a party list because the area now being serviced under the program does not have a tracked voting history like the previous precinct. Accordingly, the 85th Legislature may wish to explore ways for counties to appoint election day judges and clerks for the countywide polling places when voting history of an area cannot be tracked.

Second Recommendation

The Secretary of State also suggests the Legislature examine whether to require the first election at which countywide polling places are used be an election other than the November general election for state and county officers. This change would allow county election officials, local political subdivisions within the county, and the voters of the county to become familiar with the concept and in effect run a smaller scale election with countywide election day polling places before deciding whether the county should apply to use the countywide polling places in a November General Election.

Third Recommendation

Section 43.007(a)(5) of the Texas Election Code currently reads that the countywide polling place program can be used in an “election of a political subdivision that is held jointly” with the general election for state and county officers, an election on the uniform election date in May, a constitutional amendment election, or a joint primary or runoff primary election. The section does not distinguish if “held jointly” means a joint election agreement under Chapter 271 of the Code or if it also applies to an entity contracting for election services with the county under Chapter 31, Subchapter D. Accordingly, the 85th Legislature may wish to explicitly clarify “held jointly” in this section.

Overall Observations

For the moment, countywide polling places effects on voter turnout are difficult to gauge. However, anecdotal evidence from the participating counties, including feedback from voters and election officials, along with the turnout percentages, suggests countywide election polling

places offer a way to ensure that voters who plan to vote in the election have an increased opportunity to do so much as with early voting.

Overall, there were very little technical issues reported concerning the use of countywide polling places as there had been in the past. This could be a result of counties becoming more familiar with the program. Many concerns from voters stemmed from issues that were unrelated to the use of the program itself, such as lack of adequate signage or parking spaces or extended wait times. These are issues that should be addressed by participating counties as they move forward with the program.

Statutory Considerations

- Provide procedure for appointment of election day judges and clerks for counties participating in the countywide polling place program, much like Section 32.002 does for other countywide elections.
- Examine whether the elections eligible for first participation should be elections in addition to the November general election for state and county officers.
- Explicitly clarify the meaning of “held jointly” under Section 43.007(a)(5) to indicate whether this means a joint election agreement, a contract for election services or both.