March 30, 2010

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
             Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
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FROM: Dean C. Logan, Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

SUBJECT: VOTING SYSTEM ASSESSMENT PROJECT UPDATE

This report is to inform your Board of the recent progress of our Department's Voting System Assessment Project. Since the initial announcement of our project, in the fall of 2009, we have made significant progress in the implementation of the first phase of our project. Since the announcement of our project we have coordinated a public launch, solidified a research partnership, and helped secure important grant funding to support the project's public engagement and research activities.

Background

The Voting System Assessment Project was developed by the Department in response to the growing voting system needs and challenges faced by the County. The current *InkaVote Plus* and *Microcomputer Tally System* voting systems have served the voters of Los Angeles County with accuracy and integrity. But the design of these systems and the age of their technology do not offer the technical and functional elasticity necessary to continue to accommodate the growing electorate, its diversity, and needed innovations to help improve the accessibility and efficiency of elections.

The size and diversity of Los Angeles County, however, make it almost impossible to reasonably consider a Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) voting system solution. Currently, we serve more than four million registered voters across four thousand square miles and five hundred political districts, while also providing election services in six federally mandated languages other than English. Any voting system solution

will entail a significant development or customization process that will require clearly established principles and needs to be satisfied.

In response to these needs and challenges, and cognizant that the significant financial investment required to modernize and replace the County's voting system leaves little room for error; the project seeks to adequately evaluate the current and future needs of voters, the necessary security, and durability that a new voting system will need to satisfy.

Project Update

1. Project Launch
On September 16, 2009, the Department launched its Voting System Assessment Project with a public symposium. The Department, in collaboration with the Voting Technology Project (VTP), hosted a symposium at Caltech, "Technology, Diversity, Democracy: The Future of Voting Systems in Los Angeles County." This event brought more than 70 stakeholders, experts, and policymakers together for a day of presentations and candid conversation about our current voting system, opinions about core topics like accessibility, security, user-friendliness, and the future of voting systems in general. Much of the work of the symposium came in small break-out sessions, where participants had the opportunity to discuss the current system used in Los Angeles County, and the attributes they see as important for the future of voting systems in Los Angeles County.   An initial summary report of the symposium findings is enclosed with my report. You can also access full symposium materials and presentations on our Department website at www.lavote.net/vsap.

2. Project Partnership
Following the kick-off symposium the Voting Technology Project (VTP) agreed to serve as a project partner of the Voting System Assessment Project, providing important research support and a breadth of experience in the area of voting systems research. The Voting Technology Project is a collaboration of the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Beginning with its initial report in 2001, *Voting: What Is/What Could Be,* the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project has been involved in numerous efforts to convene experts and stakeholders in the process of improving election systems, and has issued several reports based on the investigations it has conducted. Two important national conferences, in 2001 and 2004, assessed election technology reform nationwide. A conference and subsequent report in 2003 addressed voting technology changes in Massachusetts. Other conferences have addressed more focused topics, such as

standard setting (2002), the state of the voting systems industry (2009), and voter registration and identification (2006). Reports issued by the VTP, collectively and by individual members of the project, have spanned the full set of issues pertaining to election reform in the United States, including ballot design, security, auditing, voting machine performance, and voter registration. By championing a rigorous, scientific approach to election technology and reform, the VTP is recognized as an expert, impartial organization with experience working with a diverse set of stakeholders in the area of election reform.

3. Research Funding

Thanks to the partnership with the Voting Technology Project and the support of the James Irvine Foundation, the project has secured a $150,000 grant in support the project's initial research activities – specifically to support data collection and the development of the key principles that will serve as the foundation for the acquisition and development of a modernized voting system for Los Angeles County.

4. Research Activities

Research activities seek to collect and analyze sound data from a diversity of sources including: voters, community organizations, poll workers, election advocates, local election officials, and other election experts. The following is a summary of the various research activities that the project will engage in over the next three months.

- **Countywide telephone and internet survey (March 2010).** This month the VTP fielded a countywide survey of registered voters. The survey collected an array of data on the voting experiences and voting systems opinions of registered voters in Los Angeles County. This questionnaire was fielded online (using a sample of 500 Los Angeles County registered voters), and by telephone (with a sample of 500 randomly selected Los Angeles County registered voters). The telephone survey also produced samples of Spanish-speaking and Mandarin-speaking registered voters. We will work with the telephone survey firm to ensure that we received adequate demographic and geographic coverage of registered voters in Los Angeles County.

- **Registered voter focus groups (April 2010).** In order to augment the input from traditionally underrepresented populations within the Los Angeles electorate, the VTP in collaboration with the Department will conduct a total of 15 formal, commercial-model focus groups. The table below lists the various groups scheduled:

Cohorts	Description/Language	Total Groups
General Electorate		1
Race/Ethnicity (We can do one English for each multilingual group)	• Asian: Chinese (Mand.), Korean, Korean Latino/Spanish (Immigrant)	6
Voters with disabilities	Voters with a range of disabilities: • Blind • Wheel Chair • Dexterity problems • Deaf and hard of hearing—Sign language	2
Permanent Vote-by-Mail Voters	• Established for some time • Recently declared	1
African American	Targeting urban centers (e.g. Central City, South Bay)	2

- **Poll Worker Survey (May 2010).** Election workers are a significant universe of voting system users. Input from this segment of users is vital to ensuring that a system is not only effective for voters but also easy and practical to use for election workers. Working with the project partners we will incorporate a survey into our online Poll Worker Training programs.

- **Community forums (April-May 2010).** Partner with members of the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk's Community Voter Outreach Committee (CVOC) to coordinate voting system discussions with key community partners representing core County constituencies. Coordinate 10 community forums throughout the county with various populations. These partners could include active organizations such as APALC, NALEO, League of Women Voters, etc. The goal of these discussions is to augment and collect community input within indigenous community settings and coordinated by a trusted entity/organization.

Conclusion

The Department continues its commitment to ensure that future voting systems serve the needs of our core constituencies in Los Angeles County while preserving our

commitment to conducting fair, accessible, and transparent elections. In June, we will provide a follow up report detailing the findings of this first phase of the Voting Systems Assessment Project. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at (562) 462-2720 or via email at dlogan@rrcc.lacounty.gov.

c: Ellen Sandt, Deputy Chief Executive Officer