

**REPORT FROM THE SHASTA COUNTY CITIZENS ELECTION ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON  
RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VOTE BY MAIL BALLOT DROP BOXES  
(DROP BOX)**

To the Honorable Board of Supervisors (Board), County of Shasta, State of California:

The Shasta County Citizens Election Advisory Committee respectfully submits the following information for the Board's consideration at their next scheduled meeting.

As of this date, Committee members include:

Ronnean Lund, Chair

Dr. Lisa Michaud, Vice Chair

Dawn Duckett, Member

Susanne Baremore, Member

Bev Gray, Member

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

California State Elections Code, Section 3025 states, "'Vote by mail ballot drop box" means a secure receptacle established by a county or city and county elections official whereby a voted vote by mail ballot may be returned to the elections official from whom it was obtained." There are several potential issues with drop boxes, including but not limited to:

- 1) Can drop boxes be adequately secured?
- 2) Are ballots safe at every step on the process when drop boxes are in use so that voters have faith in the voting system?
- 3) Can ballots be stolen from drop boxes?
- 4) Are ballots in drop boxes in Shasta County treated with the same security as a bank protects cash?
- 5) Can ballot traffickers add ballots to a drop box?
- 6) Are drop boxes in Shasta County under surveillance, so criminals can be caught and immediately prosecuted?
- 7) Are drop boxes a burden on taxpayers?

A "ballot trafficker" is defined as someone who is paid money to steal, surrender, or deposit a ballot.

**NUMBER OF DROP BOXES REQUIRED**

Drop boxes are targets for ballot trafficking, so the fewer drop boxes, the better the election security; and the better the election security, the more faith the voters have in their election system.

California Election Code, Section 3025.5 (see Exhibit 1), requires there be at least one drop box for every 30,000 registered voters within the jurisdiction where the election is held, as determined on the 88<sup>th</sup> day before the day of the election. The 88<sup>th</sup> day before the March 5, 2024, election was December 8, 2023. From the California Secretary of States website, as of December 19, 2023, there were 112,627 registered voters in Shasta County. That would require Shasta County to have four drop boxes for the upcoming March 5, 2024, election. Per the Shasta County Elections office website, "List of Drop Box Locations", for the upcoming March 5, 2024, election, shows 16 drop box locations being provided.

Each drop box must be installed, monitored, cleared out regularly, removed, stored, and should have appropriately completed chain-of-custodies created for them; all of which require staff time and have associated costs. Extra drop boxes, above and beyond that which is required by law, not only provide potential for illegal activities, but they are a burden on taxpayers.

### **LOCATION OF DROP BOXES**

Some of the current 16 drop box locations the Shasta County Elections office is providing include locations within businesses that are not open 24/7. These locations present insecure situations where no one knows who may have access to the drop boxes during nonbusiness hours.

Except for the cities of Redding and Anderson, all of the current drop box locations are within one mile of the community's United States post office.

Taxpayers already pay the United States Postal Service for mail transportation. If people drop their ballot at a United States post office, it does not cost the County the additional money that drop boxes do, and the tax payers are not paying for two, redundant, mail transportation services. In addition, if a person places a ballot into a United States Postal Service receptacle that was fraudulently filled out or trafficked, they are committing a Federal crime. There are no Federal laws regarding the fraudulent use of drop boxes. Drop boxes make it more convenient and safer for criminals to inject fraudulent ballots into the election system.

For security purposes, all drop boxes should be located at police or fire stations.

### **VIDEO SURVEILLANCE OF DROP BOXES**

California Code of Regulations, Title 2, Section 20135(e) states, "If feasible, drop boxes shall be monitored by a video security surveillance system, or an internal camera that can capture digital images and/or video. A video security surveillance system can include existing systems on county, city, or private buildings." (See Exhibit B)

Twenty-four hour video surveillance has proven to be the best way to document crimes at drop boxes. No drop boxes should be placed without 24/7 video surveillance. Surveillance recordings must be clear, record 24/7 when the drop box is in use, be live streamed, be constantly monitored by the Elections office, and the video should be retained for the minimum period required for retention of ballots.

If order to discourage ballot trafficking, video surveillance must capture a front view to show the face of the person delivering the ballot(s) and a side view to see if the person delivering the ballot(s) is photographing the ballot prior to depositing it. If a person visits multiply drop boxes in a day or over a period of time, this may indicate ballot trafficking. Video is the only record of this potential criminal activity. In addition, videos of drop box surveillance should be available for public review upon request.

Signage should be added to every drop box location which states, "You are being recorded." Since all drop boxes are located in public areas, there is no presumption of privacy when placing a ballot in a drop box.

### **CHAIN OF CUSTODY OF DROP BOX CONTENTS**

Review of the Shasta County 2022 General Election chain-of-custodies for drop boxes shows incomplete information. (See Exhibit C) All drop box contents should have fully completed chains-of-custody. The less number of drop boxes, the less worry about incomplete chains-of-custodies.

Ballot retrievers used to collect the ballots from drop boxes should be bipartisan, so there is no question about the intentions of the ballot retrievers. This implies the Elections office must hire a relatively equal number of people from various political parties as temporary election workers. Bipartisan teams of ballot retrievers have, reportedly, hindered election fraud in other states.

### **TYPE OF DROP BOXES USED**

Some of the drop boxes currently used by Shasta County are flimsy and make it easy to access the contents inside. All drop boxes should be made of material that cannot be tampered with, should be made so contents of the box cannot be accessed by the public, and should be locked in place with a chain and lock or some other securing device.

### **PROSECUTION OF BALLOT TRAFFICING**

If potential ballot trafficking is found through surveillance of ballot boxes, it must be investigated and halted immediately, so the election is not jeopardized or influenced and so the public maintains trust in the election process.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING DROP BOXES TO BOLSTER SHASTA COUNTY'S ELECTION SYSTEM**

- 1) Shasta County should use the minimum number of drop boxes required by law, in order to detour illegal activities, including ballot trafficking; to save tax payers money; and to make people feel more confident in their election system.
- 2) All drop boxes should only be located at police or fire stations. Drop boxes should never be located within businesses that are not open 24/7, as it creates insecure circumstances for drop box contents.
- 3) All drop boxes should have clear 24/7 video surveillance. Video surveillance should capture both a front viewing, showing someone's face, and a side view, to see how many ballots someone may be depositing and whether or not they are photographing the deposit. Video surveillance should be live streamed and available to the public upon request. Videos should be retained for the minimum length of time required to retain ballots. Signage should be added to every drop box stating, "You are being recorded".
- 4) The County Elections office should make an effort to assure chains-of-custody for drop boxes are fully and accurately completed, with all the required information by law.
- 5) The County Elections office should hire a relatively equal number of people from various political parties as temporary election workers, and drop box collection teams should be bipartisan.
- 6) All drop boxes used in Shasta County should be made of material that cannot be tampered with, should be made so contents of the box cannot be accessed by the public, and should be locked in place with a chain and lock or some other securing device.
- 7) The public should be assured by officials that ballot trafficking is actively being deterred and will be prosecuted if found.
- 8) Local laws should be enacted that ensure drop box and ballot safety.