



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

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FACT SHEET

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The California State Auditor released the following report today:

County Poll Workers

The Office of the Secretary of State Has Developed Statewide Guidelines, but County Training Programs Need Some Improvement

BACKGROUND

California's 58 counties must be prepared to accommodate the more than 15.7 million diverse registered voters on election days. When Californians become eligible to vote in elections, they register with their county elections officials or through certain designated public agencies. Voters can participate in a political party's nominating process by registering with one of the qualified political parties certified by the Office of the Secretary of State (office) or they can decline to state an affiliation and only participate in the nominating process when an individual party allows it and has met certain requirements. The office is responsible for administering the Elections Code and ensuring that elections are conducted efficiently and state election laws are followed, while the county elections officials conduct elections and hire and train poll workers.

KEY FINDINGS

Our review of the office's role in providing poll worker training guidelines and the county elections officials' training of poll workers, revealed the following:

- ◆ Although state law required the office to adopt statewide uniform standards for the training of poll workers—which it did nearly 10 months after the statutorily established time frame—state law does not require the office to regularly update the standards. Thus, the office has not revised the standards since it issued them in 2006.
- ◆ The poll worker training guidelines do not address the voting rights for decline-to-state voters, yet they represented almost 20 percent of all registered voters in February 2008. The office did, however, modify its voter information guide for the June 2008 primary to educate these voters about their rights and all eight counties we visited provided information in their training classes prior to the June primary.
- ◆ State law does not require the office to ensure counties implement the statewide training standards. However, the office does have an Election Day Observation Program it implemented in 2003 as a means of monitoring activities at the voting polls and identifying ways to strengthen poll worker training and voter education programs.
- ◆ Most of the poll worker training programs provided by the eight counties we reviewed need improvement even though they generally complied with the office's guidelines. Further, elections officials for three of the counties do not believe they are required to follow the office's training guidelines and many counties rely on other sources of information for updating their training programs.
- ◆ Not all poll workers are required to attend training, and six of the eight counties we visited did not have reliable data to demonstrate that at a minimum, all of their inspectors had been trained before the February 2008 election.
- ◆ Most counties we reviewed were unable to provide documentation indicating how they responded to complaints from voters, poll workers, or both during the February or June 2008 elections.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommended that the Legislature consider amending state law to direct the office to regularly update its poll worker training guidelines and to monitor county adherence. County elections officials should review the content of their poll worker training programs to ensure they fully cover all topics detailed in the office's guidelines and update the training based on complaints and questions received during elections. Moreover, counties could improve poll workers' willingness to attend training and to retain lessons learned by tailoring the training based on experience and offering more sessions at various locations, and by providing online training materials and additional workshops just days prior to an election.

