



Humboldt County Office of Elections
Juan Pablo Cervantes, Clerk, Recorder & Registrar of Voters
2624 6th St, Eureka, CA 95501

June 16, 2023

Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury
Humboldt County Superior Court
825 5th Street
Eureka, CA 95501

RE: Grand Jury 2023 Report: HUMBOLDT COUNTY ELECTIONS INTEGRITY
IT'S OKAY TO VOTE!

Dear Honorable Civil Grand Jury Members,

Attached is my response to the Grand Jury report HUMBOLDT COUNTY ELECTIONS INTEGRITY IT'S OKAY TO VOTE. I agree with all but one of the report's findings. Finding F3 pertaining to ballot drop box security. Furthermore, the office is currently in the process of or has completed the process of implementing all the recommendations except for one. Recommendation R3 which also pertains to ballot drop box security. The rationale for this is contained in my response to the findings and recommendations which is attached. I appreciate the diligent work that the Civil Grand Jury engaged in the creation of this report, findings, and recommendations. The Humboldt County Office of Elections will continue to assess its processes, services, and structure in order to better serve the County of Humboldt.

Sincerely,

Juan P. Cervantes
Clerk, Recorder & Registrar of Voters
707-445-7481

CC: Humboldt County Superior Court Presiding Judge Joyce D. Hinrichs

Humboldt County Office of Elections response to Civil Grand Jury Report: HUMBOLDT COUNTY ELECTIONS INTEGRITY IT'S OKAY TO VOTE!

FINDINGS:

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury, while investigating the Elections Office during the election cycle of November 8, 2022, found that:

F1. The elections procedure was secure and had many double and triple checks to make sure the election was safe and secure.

Response: Agree

F2. There is no internal manual describing the various election duties unique to Humboldt County. This could lead to specific job duties and tasks being overlooked.

Response: Agree

F3. Some ballot drop boxes are not adequately secured in their designated locations, making their removal possible.

Response: Disagree

Ballot drop boxes are deployed by The County of Humboldt's Office of Elections following industry standards to ensure security. Drop boxes are secured and located inside locations that are monitored. Furthermore, drop boxes have various security seals to prevent tampering. The County is committed to assessing and upgrading drop box security as needed to address any assessed concerns.

F4. The Candidate Guide does not explain listing order on the ballot for local government candidates, creating unnecessary confusion.

Response: Agree

F5. Some managers did not receive the Poll Managers Training Manual but were taught from the Poll Workers Training Manual. This caused some unnecessary confusion with the successful completion of their duties.

Response: Agree

F6. Some Poll Workers did not participate in mandatory training, which contributed to process errors.

Response: Agree

F7. Having an outside nonprofit watchdog group is a useful check of ballot counting and tallying, providing validation to Humboldt County Elections.

Response: Agree

F8. A Humboldt County Elections employee was serving on the Board of the nonprofit watchdog group validating that election. This results in the perception of a conflict of interest.

Response: Agree

F9. There is no evidence of a Contract or Memorandum of Understanding between the Elections Office and the nonprofit watchdog volunteer group, known as the Elections Transparency Project, making the responsibilities of each entity unclear.

Response: Agree

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. The Humboldt County Elections Office prepares policy and procedural manuals that can be amended and kept up-to-date annually or after each election. We recommend that this be completed before the next local, primary or general election. (F2)

This recommendation will be implemented.

Policy and procedural manuals have been and are continuing to be developed. As the Humboldt County Office of Elections prepares for the implementation of the Voters Choice Act, these materials will undergo a rigorous vetting process. It is expected that updates to elections policy and procedure manuals will be implemented by the March, 5, 2024 Primary Election.

R2. The Humboldt County Elections Office prepares a written matrix detailing specific duties and tasks to be performed and the persons responsible for those duties. We recommend that this be accomplished before the next local, primary or general election. (F2) (F5)

This recommendation will be implemented.

As discussed in the previous recommendation (R1), the County of Humboldt's Elections policy and procedural manuals are in the process of being developed. while the Elections Office prepares for the implementation of the Voters Choice Act. Duties and tasks will be included in the finalized policy and procedure documents following a rigorous vetting process. Additionally, the Office of Elections has deployed a task management system designed to ensure that tasks are assigned and completed in a timely manner. These systems will be updated regularly according to legislative, regulatory, and best practice changes as required by law or as-needed

R3. The Humboldt County Elections Office replaces and upgrades ballot drop boxes for additional security. We recommend that this be accomplished before the next local, primary or general election. (F3)

This recommendation will not be implemented.

Security, convenience and accessibility of drop boxes are the primary objectives for the Humboldt County Elections Office related to this service. Elections several years ago established a permanent, secure drop box at its main office at the Humboldt Plaza, where the majority of absentee ballots are deposited. Elections takes great care when placing drop boxes at voting centers and polling locations to ensure the office follows best practices and state guidance, which address these factors, and will continue to do so. The Elections Office and its team of poll workers regularly monitors drop boxes, placing them in locations of high visibility and traffic, and placing them indoors whenever feasible. The office has not received credible reports of drop box tampering. The office will review its security procedures when placing drop boxes for the upcoming elections.

R4. The Humboldt County Elections Office updates the Candidate Guide adding a section explaining candidate ballot listing order. This section shall be pursuant to the State of California Election Code § 13111. We recommend that this be accomplished before the next local, primary or general election. (F4)

The recommendation has been implemented.

A section explaining candidate ballot listing order has been included in the County of Humboldt's candidate guide materials.

R5. The Humboldt County Elections Office provides all Poll Workers with mandatory training prior to working on any election. We recommend that this be accomplished before the next local, primary or general election. (F6)

This recommendation will be implemented.

As a part of the transition to the Voters Choice Act, substantive mandatory training programs are being revised for the next local, primary or general election. It is anticipated these trainings will be implemented by the March, 5, 2024 Primary Election.

R6. The Humboldt County Elections Office creates either a Contract or Memorandum of Understanding between the Humboldt County Elections Office and any volunteer nonprofit watchdog group. We recommend that this be accomplished before the next local, primary or general election. (F8) (F9)

This recommendation will be implemented.

This task will take time to complete. However, both the Elections Office and the Transparency Project are committed to creating a Memorandum of Understanding between the County of Humboldt's Office of Elections and the Elections Transparency Project prior to the March 5, 2024 Presidential Primary Election.

R7. The Humboldt County Elections Office assures the public that no County Elections Office employees serve on the board of directors of any election watchdog group. We recommend that this be accomplished before the next local, primary or general election. (F8) (F9)

This recommendation has been implemented.

There are currently no Humboldt County Elections employees serving as board members for the Election Transparency Project. As a policy no Humboldt County Elections Employees shall serve as board members for the Elections Transparency Project while representing the Humboldt County Office of Elections.