



Texas Secretary of State

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Report to the 87th 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 2019/2020 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 2019 and 2020 uniform election dates, the March 2020 primary election and July 2020 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 in the pilot program, 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. Lubbock and Erath Counties participated in the House Bill 3105 program.

House Bill 719, enacted by the 81st Texas Legislature, made the pilot program permanent. It added language requiring a county to retain sixty-five 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.)

House Bill 719 also 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 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 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 of the Program in their county, and the county reports will be available on the Secretary of State's website.

Senate Bill 578, enacted by the 83rd Texas Legislature, expanded the Program for use in each primary election and runoff primary election if the county chair or county executive committee of 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 had used the countywide election precinct method of voting. Prior law required counties to apply to use countywide election precincts election-by-election. House Bill 2194 added Section 43.007(k)(2) to the Code, allowing counties to continue using countywide election precincts without further approval from the Secretary of State.

To date, seventy-two Texas counties have applied for and met the Secretary of State's requirements for the “successful” countywide precinct polling place designation: Aransas County, Archer County, Atascosa County, Bee County, Bell County, Bexar County, Brazoria County, Brazos County, Callahan County, Collin County, Comal County, Coryell County, Dallas County, Deaf Smith County, DeWitt County, Eastland County, Ector County, Ellis County, Erath County, Floyd County, Fort Bend County, Gaines County, Galveston

County, Grayson County, Gregg County, Grimes County, Guadalupe County, Harris County, Hays County, Henderson County, Hidalgo County, Hood County, Hopkins County, Howard County, Jack County, Jefferson County, Jones County, Kaufman County, Kendall County, Lampasas County, Lee County, Lubbock County, Madison County, Marion County, McLennan County, Medina County, Midland County, Milam County, Montague County, Navarro County, Nueces County, Palo Pinto County, Parker County, Potter County, Randall County, Rusk County, San Jacinto County, San Patricio County, Scurry County, Smith County, Swisher County, Tarrant County, Taylor County, Throckmorton County, Tom Green County, Travis County, Upshur County, Victoria County, Wharton County, Wichita County, Williamson County, and Young County.

Implementation of Current Program

Four counties were selected for the May 4, 2019 uniform election date: Bee County, Ellis County, Harris County, and Howard County.

Nine counties were selected for the November 5, 2019 uniform election date: Atascosa County, Bexar County, Comal County, Dallas County, Hays County, Henderson County, Jones County, Kendall County, and Tarrant County.

Three counties were selected for the March 3, 2020 primary election: Bell County, Marion County, and Scurry County.

Five counties were selected for the November 3, 2020 general election: Burnet County, El Paso County, Liberty County, Somervell County, and Walker 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

A. May 4, 2019 Uniform Election

Bee County

According to the 2010 Census, Bee County's population is 31,861.

May 4, 2019

Bee County's initial election under the program was the May 4, 2019 uniform election date. Prior to participating in the program, Bee County generally had 5 county election polling places. In the uniform election held on May 4, 2019, the county opted to maintain 4 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Bee County's turnout trends for the uniform election date in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 19.75% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 4.15% turnout for the uniform election in 2017 and a 7.9% turnout for the uniform election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Bee County reflects that the response from voters was favorable to the program.

Bee County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on July 12, 2019.

Ellis County

According to the 2010 Census, Ellis County’s population is 149,610.

May 4, 2019

Ellis County’s initial election under the program was the May 4, 2019 uniform election date. Prior to participating in the program, Ellis County generally had 19 county election polling places. In the uniform election held on May 4, 2019, the county opted to maintain 19 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Ellis County’s turnout trends for the uniform election date in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 13.08% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 7.61% turnout for the uniform election in 2017 and a 11.77% turnout for the uniform election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Ellis County reflects that the response from voters, election workers, and the general public was favorable to the program. A survey conducted by Ellis County indicates that voters generally found the program to be more convenient.

Ellis County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on July 11, 2019.

Harris County

According to the 2010 Census, Harris County’s population is 4,092,459.

May 4, 2019

Harris County’s initial election under the program was the May 4, 2019 uniform election date. Prior to participating in the program, Harris County generally had 700 county election polling places. In the uniform election held on May 4, 2019, the county contracted with 23 entities to conduct their elections, the most partners ever for a May election. A total of 296 precincts and 44 ballot styles were required for this election.

Turnout Trends

The election report presented by Harris County reflects that 28,188 voters cast a ballot in this election, a turnout of about 4%. This turnout was on par with past May elections in Harris County.

Public Feedback

Harris County requested feedback from voters as they left the polling place before and on election day. Voters positively evaluated their voting experience by margins approaching, and in most instances exceeding, 90%. Of the voters who cast a ballot in the May 4, 2019 uniform election, 36% chose to cast a ballot at a location different than what would be considered their home precinct.

Harris County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on August 2, 2019.

Howard County

According to the 2010 Census, Howard County’s population is 35,012.

May 4, 2019

Howard County’s initial election under the program was the May 4, 2019 uniform election date. Prior to participating in the program, Howard County generally had 6 county election polling places. In the uniform election held on May 4, 2019, the county opted to maintain 4 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Howard County’s turnout trends for the uniform election date in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 13.81% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 9.88% turnout for the uniform election in 2017 and a 6.86% turnout for the uniform election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Howard County reflects that the response from voters, election workers, and the general public was favorable to the program.

Howard County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on September 6, 2019.

B. November 5, 2019 Uniform Election

Atascosa County

According to the 2010 Census, Atascosa County’s population is 44,911.

November 5, 2019

Atascosa County’s initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Atascosa County had 7 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county utilized 15 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Atascosa County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 12.70% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 3.40% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 9.10% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

Voters and election workers expressed positive remarks about the program.

Atascosa County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 30, 2019.

Bexar County

According to the 2010 Census, Bexar County's population is 1,714,773.

November 5, 2019

Bexar County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Bexar County had 287 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county opted to maintain 284 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Bexar County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 9.58% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 3.7% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 8.13% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Bexar County reflects that the response from voters was favorable to the program. A survey conducted by Bexar County indicates that 40% of voters chose to vote outside their assigned polling place for the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election.

Bexar County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 23, 2019.

Comal County

According to the 2010 Census, Comal County's population is 108,472.

November 5, 2019

Comal County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Comal County had 13 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county opted to maintain 13 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Comal County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 15.27% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 3.63% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 14.86% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Comal County reflects that the response from voters, election workers, and others was favorable to the program.

Comal County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 30, 2019.

Dallas County

According to the 2010 Census, Dallas County's population is 2,368,139.

November 5, 2019

Dallas County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Dallas County had 466 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county opted to maintain 466 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Dallas County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 9.76% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 6.52% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 9.06% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Dallas County reflects that the response from voters, election workers, and others was favorable to the program. Voters expressed support for the program because it allowed them to select the most convenient polling place on election day.

Dallas County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 23, 2019.

Hays County

According to the 2010 Census, Hays County's population is 157,107.

November 5, 2019

Hays County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Hays County had 19 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county utilized 37 county election polling places in preparation for future elections.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Hays County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 13.53% turnout of registered voters for 2019, compared to a 6.75% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 10.65% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Hays County reflects that the response from voters was favorable to the program.

Hays County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 27, 2019.

Henderson County

According to the 2010 Census, Henderson County's population is 78,532.

November 5, 2019

Henderson County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Henderson County had 16 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county utilized 24 county election polling places in preparation for future elections.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Henderson County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 indicate a 15.09% turnout of registered voters, compared to a 3.76% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 20.08% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Henderson County reflects that the response from voters and election workers was favorable to the program.

Henderson County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 30, 2019.

Jones County

According to the 2010 Census, Jones County's population is 20,202.

November 5, 2019

Jones County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Jones County had 4 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county utilized 7 county election polling places in preparation for future elections.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Jones County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 indicate a 17.59% turnout of registered voters, compared to a 3.89% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 24.73% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Jones County reflects that the response from voters and a local political subdivision was favorable to the program.

Jones County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 27, 2019.

Kendall County

According to the 2010 Census, Kendall County's population is 33,410.

November 5, 2019

Kendall County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Kendall County had 11 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county opted to maintain 11 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Kendall County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 19% turnout of registered voters, compared to a 4.5% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 17% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Kendall County reflects that the response from voters was favorable to the program. A survey conducted by Kendall County indicates that 93% of voters responded favorably to the county's use of the program in all future elections. The report also reflects that 40.67% of voters chose to vote outside their assigned polling place for the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election.

Kendall County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on January 13, 2020.

Tarrant County

According to the 2010 Census, Tarrant County's population is 1,809,034.

November 5, 2019

Tarrant County's initial election under the program was the November 5, 2019 Constitutional Amendment Election. Prior to participating in the program, Tarrant County had 340 county election polling places. For the Constitutional Amendment Election held on November 5, 2019, the county opted to maintain 332 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Tarrant County's turnout trends for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 11.81% turnout of registered voters, compared to a 5% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2017 and a 9.44% turnout for the Constitutional Amendment Election in 2015.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Tarrant County reflects that the response from voters, election workers, and local political subdivisions was favorable to the program.

Tarrant County applied for "successful" status and was designated as a "successful" county under the program on December 27, 2019.

C. March 3, 2020 Primary Election

Bell County

According to the 2010 Census, Bell County's population is 310,235.

March 3, 2020

Bell County's initial election under the program was the March 3, 2020 primary election. Prior to participating in the program, Bell County had 48 county election polling places. In the primary election held on March 3, 2020, the county opted to maintain 41 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Bell County's turnout trends for the primary election in 2020 indicate a 20.37% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 14.17% turnout for the primary election in 2018 and a 24.68% turnout for the primary election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Bell County reflects that voters were grateful to be able to access any polling place on election day and not have to travel back to their home precinct to vote. Voters and election workers also expressed positive remarks about the program.

Bell County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on July 1, 2020.

Marion County

According to the 2010 Census, Marion County’s population is 10,546.

March 3, 2020

Marion County’s initial election under the program was the March 3, 2020 primary election. Prior to participating in the program, Marion County had 10 county election polling places. In the primary election held on March 3, 2020, the county opted to maintain 7 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Marion County’s turnout trends for the primary election in 2020 indicate a 30.55% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 23.03% turnout for the primary election in 2018 and a 33.4% turnout for the primary election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Marion County reflects that responses from voters, election judges, and clerks were overwhelmingly positive for the program.

Marion County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on May 12, 2020.

Scurry County

According to the 2010 Census, Scurry County’s population is 16,921.

March 3, 2020

Scurry County’s initial election under the program was the March 3, 2020 primary election. Prior to participating in the program, Scurry County had 11 county election polling places. In the primary election held on March 3, 2020, the county opted to maintain 7 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Scurry County’s turnout trends for the primary election in 2020 indicate a 31.95% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 24.09% turnout for the primary election in 2018 and a 33.42% turnout for the primary election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Scurry County reflects that responses from voters, election judges, and clerks were overwhelmingly positive for the program.

Scurry County applied for “successful” status and was designated as a “successful” county under the program on May 15, 2020.

D. November 3, 2020 General Election

Burnet County

According to the 2010 Census, Burnet County’s population is 42,750.

November 3, 2020

Burnet County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2020 general election. Prior to participating in the program, Burnet County had 20 county election polling places. In the general election held on November 3, 2020, the county utilized 21 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Burnet County’s turnout trends for the general election in 2020 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 73.9% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 61.22% turnout for the general election in 2018 and a 67.44% turnout for the general election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Burnet County reflects that voters were favorable to the program and appreciated being able to vote closer to their jobs.

Burnet County applied for “successful” status, and a review of its application is currently pending with the Secretary of State.

El Paso County

According to the 2010 Census, El Paso County’s population is 800,647.

November 3, 2020

El Paso County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2020 general election. Prior to participating in the program, El Paso County generally had 150 county election polling places. In the general election held on November 3, 2020, the county utilized 151 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of El Paso County’s turnout trends for the general election in 2020 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 55% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 45% turnout for the general election in 2018 and a 51% turnout for the general election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by El Paso County reflects that voters expressed unwavering support for the program. A survey conducted by El Paso County indicates that 96% of voters found the program to be more

convenient than assigned precinct polling places.

El Paso County applied for “successful” status, and a review of its application is currently pending with the Secretary of State.

Liberty County

According to the 2010 Census, Liberty County’s population is 75,643.

November 3, 2020

Liberty County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2020 general election. Prior to participating in the program, Liberty County had 30 county election polling places. In the general election held on November 3, 2020, the county opted to maintain 20 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Liberty County’s turnout trends for the general election in 2020 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 59.99% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 47.36% turnout for the general election in 2018 and a 57.60% turnout for the general election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report presented by Liberty County reflects that voters generally favored the continued use of the program due to voter convenience. The election report also indicates that most of the cities and school districts in Liberty County supported the use of the program.

Somervell County

According to the 2010 Census, Somervell County’s population is 8,490.

November 3, 2020

Somervell County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2020 general election. Prior to participating in the program, Somervell County had 4 county election polling places. In the general election held on November 3, 2020, the county opted to maintain 4 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Somervell County’s turnout trends for the general election in 2020 indicate a 74.62% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 67.86% turnout for the general election in 2018 and a 87.38% turnout for the general election in 2016.

Public Feedback

The election report provided by Somervell County reflects that feedback of the program from voters and election workers was overwhelmingly positive. A survey conducted by Somervell County indicates that 80% of voters found the program to be more convenient than assigned precinct polling places.

Somervell County applied for “successful” status, and a review of its application is currently pending with the Secretary of State.

Walker County

According to the 2010 Census, Walker County’s population is 67,861.

November 3, 2020

Walker County’s initial election under the program was the November 3, 2020 general election. Prior to participating in the program, Walker County had 16 county election polling places. In the general election held on November 3, 2020, the county opted to maintain 11 county election polling places.

Turnout Trends

An analysis of Walker County’s turnout trends for the general election in 2020 showed an increase in turnout. Reports indicate a 68% turnout of registered voters for 2020, compared to a 56% turnout for the general election in 2018 and a 62% turnout for the general election in 2016.

Public Feedback

Post-election surveys regarding the program were sent to community leaders and other special interest groups, local political subdivisions, local party chairs, elected officials, and election workers. Overall, the voters’ comments were highly favorable to maintaining the program. A survey conducted by Walker County indicates that 90.4% of voters found the program to be more convenient than assigned precinct polling places.

Walker County applied for “successful” status, and a review of its application is currently pending with the Secretary of State.

Recommendations to the 87th Texas Legislature

The countywide polling place program continues to grow and has proven successful for participating counties. For the November 2020 general election, 77 counties participated in the program, including the 72 counties previously designated as “successful.” This accounts for just over 30% of the counties in the state.

First Recommendation

Several participating counties suggested that counties be allowed to use countywide election polling places for all elections required to be conducted by a county. An example of this would be an election to fill a vacancy in the legislature under Chapter 203 of the Code. County election officials commented that some voters may become confused when the county must utilize normal election day precinct procedures for a special election when the county has taken part in multiple countywide programs and worked to educate its voters on the countywide concept. Accordingly, the 87th Legislature may wish to explore ways to extend the scope of the program.

Second Recommendation

Section 43.007(a)(5) of the Code currently reads that the countywide polling place program can be used in an “election of a political subdivision located in the county 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 indicate whether “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 of the Code. Accordingly, the 87th Legislature may wish to explicitly clarify the meaning of “held jointly” in this section.

Third Recommendation

Section 43.007(m)(2) of the Code currently reads that the county must ensure that the “total number of permanent branch and temporary branch polling places open for voting in a county commissioners precinct does not exceed more than twice the number of permanent branch and temporary branch polling places in another county commissioners precinct.” Permanent branch and temporary branch polling places are polling places which are only used during the early voting period and not on election day. Because the countywide polling place program is an election day program, the 87th Legislature may wish to clarify the reference to “permanent branch and temporary branch polling places” in this section.

Overall Observations

For the moment, the effect of the countywide polling place program on voter turnout is difficult to gauge. However, information provided by the participating counties, including feedback from voters, election officials, and party chairs, along with the turnout percentages, suggests that 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.

Counties have become more familiar with the program and several counties have expressed interest in implementing this program in the near future. Most 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

- Explore possible ways to extend the use of the program to encompass all elections required to be conducted by a county, including special elections conducted in accordance with Chapter 203 of the Code.
- Explicitly clarify the meaning of “held jointly” under Section 43.007(a)(5) of the Code to indicate whether this means a joint election agreement, a contract for election services, or both.
- Explicitly clarify the meaning of “permanent branch and temporary branch polling places” under Section 43.007(m)(2) of the Code.