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MERCED COUNTY ELECTION OBSERVER PANEL PLAN

Name of County: Merced County
Name of Contact: Darlene E. Ingersoll, Registrar of Voters
Contact Phone: (209) 385-7541 or (800) 561-0619
Date of Plan: **Revised, September 24, 2020**

I. **VOTING SYSTEM USED: ES&S DS450, DS850, & ExpressVote**

- **ExpressVote accessible ballot marking devices;**
- **DS450 & DS850 central count units** for counting vote by mail ballots and provisional ballots as part of the canvass.

II. **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of an Election Observer Panel is to:

- Provide the public with the opportunity to observe and make suggestions on ways to improve the election process.
- Help ensure the integrity of the election process.
- Remove some of the mystery associated with the election process in an effort to build voter confidence and encourage more people to take part.

III. **INVITE**

Between E-60 and E-30, prepare letters of invitation to the following:

- County Grand Jury
- Political Party Central Committee Members
- Advocacy Groups
- League of Women Voters

Other groups or individuals expressing an interest in observing Election Day activities may also be included in the observer panel.

IV. **APPOINTMENT LETTERS**

After the groups have provided the names of interested panelists, prepare letters of introduction for the panelist to use when visiting the Elections Central Counting Warehouse on Election Day. Materials to be prepared for each panelist will include the central counting site location and hours of operation.

V. GENERAL RULES FOR OBSERVERS

COVID-19 specific rules:

- All observers must wear face coverings if unvaccinated in accordance with Public Health guidelines.
- Observers must maintain physical distancing of six feet and may be asked to remain in a designated area.
- Observers can be asked to take other safety measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette and general respect for cleanliness and sanitation.
- Observation is primarily an audio-visual activity, and video, particularly if supplemented by audio, may be an appropriate substitute in some situations for physical attendance during election processing in light of COVID-19.

Observers may:

- Observe the proceedings at the Elections Central Counting Warehouse, including the opening and closing procedures.
- Make notes and watch election procedures.
- View election-related activities at the central counting site (subject to limitations due to COVID concerns and social distancing) on Election Day.
- View the canvass of the vote activities following the election.
- View vote-by-mail and provisional ballot processing.
- Ask questions of poll workers or voters at the Elections Central Counting Warehouse as long as they do not interfere with the conduct of any part of the voting process.
- Ask questions of supervisors at the central count site (subject to limitations due to COVID concerns and social distancing) as long as they do not interfere with the conduct of the election procedures.

Observers are responsible for:

- Checking in at each site, whether voting assistance center or central counting site.
- Wearing an identification badge.
- Maintaining a professional manner while observing the election process.
- Ensuring they do not interfere with the election process.
- Following established county observation rules/policies.
- Being courteous to election workers and election officials. Speak to them only when it is convenient and does not interfere with the conduct of the election.

Observers may not:

- Interfere, in the judgement of the elections official, with the conduct of the election.
- Physically handle any voting materials or equipment without the express permission of the elections official.
- Move or rearrange tables, chairs, or equipment at the Elections Central Counting Warehouse.
- Sit at the official worktables or view confidential voter information on any work terminal.
- Communicate with voters within 100 feet of the entrance to, or inside of, the Elections Central Counting Warehouse, an elections official's office, or a satellite location, regarding the casting of a vote, or speak to a voter regarding his or her qualifications to vote.
- Display any election material or wear campaign badges, buttons or apparel.
- Wear the uniform of a peace officer, a private guard, or security personnel.

- Use cellular phones, pagers, or two-way radios inside the polling place and/or within 100 feet of the entrance to the Elections Central Counting Warehouse.
- Use telephones, computers or other facilities at the Elections Central Counting Warehouse.
- Talk to or attempt to stop the central counting site workers while they are processing ballots.
- Make physical contact with election personnel.
- Eat or drink in the Elections Central Counting Warehouse.
- Assist in operations at the Elections Central Counting Warehouse.
- Prevent other observers from observing materials or a process.
- Enter secure areas without the express permission of the elections official.

Mechanism for Feedback –

Merced Elections welcomes feedback from Observers. We ask that you contact us directly during your observation period if you see an activity or action that is concerning. Following the Election, we welcome your feedback related to processes, equipment, the Observer training that you received as well as overall observations.

Please remember that the August 31, 2021 Special Vacancy Election is a mail ballot election. All active registered voters will receive an official ballot by mail.