

Approved:   
AUG 27 2012 Superior Court Judge

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# SONOMA COUNTY

Clerk-Recorder-Assessor

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**FILED**

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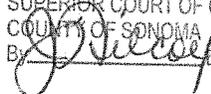
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August 8, 2012

The Honorable Rene Chouteau ✓  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
600 Administration Dr.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

AUG 27 2012

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA  
COUNTY OF SONOMA  
By  DEPUTY CLERK

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report: "Vote Green, Save Green – Vote by Mail"  
Registrar of Voters Division, County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor Department

Dear Judge Chouteau:

Following is the Registrar of Voters' required response to recommendations R4 in regard to the 2011-12 Grand Jury Report investigation titled "Vote Green, Save Green – Vote by Mail." I would like to thank all members of the Grand Jury for the research conducted on vote by mail in Sonoma County. We share the Grand Jury's enthusiasm for the cost effectiveness and efficiencies associated with expanding the Permanent Vote by Mail Program in Sonoma County and hopefully eventually converting to all Vote by Mail elections through changes in State Law.

### Response to Recommendation: (2011-2012 Grand Jury Report - Pages 8-11)

**R4 The office of the Registrar of Voters develop some way(s) to communicate to the voters of Sonoma County the qualifications and benefits of voting by mail.**

**Registrar of Voters' Response:** *This recommendation been partially implemented, but will be expanded in the future.*

The recommendation has been minimally implemented in the past, and will be fully implemented in the future. Since state law was changed in 2002, allowing any voter to apply for Permanent Vote by Mail status, the Registrar of Voters has provided numerous opportunities for voters to do so. Prior to each election voters who are not Permanent Vote by Mail voters receive Sample Ballot booklets that include Vote by Mail applications, with check boxes allowing voters to opt for Permanent Vote by Mail status. Further, in all but two regular statewide elections those voters who are not Permanent Vote by Mail voters have also been sent a separate postcard well in advance of the election providing an opportunity to apply for a Vote by Mail ballot and/or Permanent Vote by Mail status.

To date, when providing opportunities to apply for Vote by Mail ballots or Permanent Vote by Mail status, communications have been passive, maintaining a neutral tone, and have not explained the cost benefits or other advantages of voting by mail. Beginning with the postcard Vote by Mail application that will be sent sixty days prior to the November 6, 2012, General Election, future opportunities to apply for Vote by Mail ballots will include information regarding the benefits of becoming a Permanent Vote by Mail voter. In addition, a series of filler pages will be developed for the Sample Ballot booklet, which is sent to voters who are not already Permanent Vote by Mail voters. These pages will describe the qualifications to become a Permanent Vote by Mail voter and the benefits of doing so. The pages will also explain the importance of returning Vote by Mail ballots in a timely manner, and the necessity of having a recent signature on file for verification purposes. These pages will have priority placement, whenever filler pages are needed in the booklet.

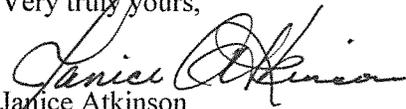
As time and resources allow, the Division will provide articles to local media and organizations regarding voting by mail and conduct Vote by Mail informational meetings for campaigns interested in promoting Vote by Mail as part of their political efforts.

As Registrar of Voters I regularly discuss the benefits of voting by mail at speaking engagements and will continue to do so. I will also advise the incoming Registrar of Voters, to assume office upon my retirement as to the importance of the Permanent Vote by Mail program, and recommend that he/she champion this program and work towards legislation allowing for all Vote by Mail elections.

**Registrar of Voters' Conclusion**

Again, I would like to thank the 2011-12 Grand Jury for the time and effort that went into the investigation of Sonoma County's voting process. Elections have become exceedingly complex and the ability to sort through and digest the information requested and provided was no simple task. I would like to clarify that the statement in the report that signatures on Vote by Mail ballot envelopes are verified by machine – in actuality the signatures are captured by machine and are uploaded to the Election Information Management System where they are visually compared with the signatures on file from the voters' registration cards. Signatures in question are reviewed by management and referred back to the voters for remedy.

Very truly yours,

  
Janice Atkinson  
Sonoma County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor

- c. Sonoma County Board of Supervisors  
Superior Court Executive Officer  
Veronica Ferguson, Sonoma County Administrator  
Gloria Colter, Assistant Registrar of Voters