



Here Comes Another Election 2026 Doing Your Part – Polling Location Observation



Many of you have not voted in person at a polling location for many years. Others of you may have never voted that way.

The vote by mail (VBM) option has grown more popular in California for various reasons such as convenience or a way to “get it over with,” to avoid missing casting a vote due to unforeseen circumstances that may arise on Election Day, to save your Party or candidates Get-out-the-Vote time and money, or to demoralize the opposition by going into Election Day “ahead.”

Each of those reasons has validity, and it is understandable that people make the decision to take advantage of the VBM system.

That said, there are **15-20% of California’s voters who are justifiably concerned** about the complete **lack of chain of custody** in the VBM system, and the clear and verified abuse of it for **potentially massive fraud and election manipulation**.

Our last two articles explored the elaborate ballot processing procedures, every step of which is fraught with potential danger and opportunity for error, malfeasance and bad intent to use ballots for manipulated results.

**In-person voters seek to avoid
those potential consequences to their ballot.**

**In-person voters must also be “protected” from
errors or bad intent at the polls.**

That “protection” best comes in the form of knowledgeable citizen Observers, armed with information that EIPCa has been providing for 15 years so that citizens can protect their own vote and those of their fellows.

With a good understanding of what to look for, YOU, as a citizen Observer, can be the difference between an honest and transparent election and one more cycle filled with suspicion and doubt.

Here's what you need to know.

Many counties have elected to operate under the structure of the [Voters Choice Act](#). Those counties will have polling places open for in-person voting starting 10 days before Election Day.

All other counties are now required to supply early-voting opportunities through satellite vote centers.

Please check your county elections office/Registrar of Voters website for days, hours and locations for all Vote Centers and polling sites.

Find the vote centers and polling locations near you and mark your calendar now so you know where you are needed.

You will likely find the experience enjoyable and rewarding!

Preparation for Observation:

Review your legal [rights and responsibilities](#), and EIPCa's recommendations for self-preparation.

When you arrive at a polling place:

Check the exterior. There should be:

1. Directional signs to ensure the voters can easily find their way
2. No electioneering, photography, intimidation, interference or political activity within 100 feet of the building
3. Well-placed signs with instructions for curbside voters

If arriving before poll opening (remember you are allowed inside the polls to observe before the polls open and after they close):

1. Check to see that workers verify that Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) or voting machines are functioning properly and either zeroed or tallies are checked to match the closing numbers from the day before.
2. Verify that all other technology is functioning properly.
3. Verify that sufficient numbers of workers are present.

4. Verify that all ballot containers are unlocked, open and empty; the first voter of the day should be asked to provide public verification and only then are containers locked and remain locked for the rest of the day.
 - In early days of voting, activity is slow, and the first voter may not arrive until well into the morning hours. This verification must wait until the first voter arrives, regardless of the time.

And don't forget—YOU get to be close enough to see and hear.

5. Ensure that the opening of the polls is ON TIME and verbally proclaimed.

Throughout the day:

1. Watch for proper procedures.
2. ASK a polite question of the **Lead Official** for clarification if anything is done in ways you understand may be incorrect.
 - Step outside and call [EIPCa HOTLINE](#) listed on our website if the procedures are not rectified or explained to your satisfaction.
 - Fill out a [Citizen Witness Statement](#) and mail as directed on the website.
3. Voters are allowed to drop off their signed and sealed VBM envelope at the polls.
 - Voters should NOT be pressured to turn in their envelope if they wish to enter and vote in person.
 - Envelopes should be inspected to see they are properly filled out before being submitted.
 - Those simply dropping off ballots should NOT have to stand in line with in-person voters. If they are being required to do so, call EIPCa HOTLINE and submit a Citizen Incident Statement.
4. Watch to see the in-person voters are required to follow a standard check-in procedure prescribed by the county.
 - By law, voters must provide name and address (no ID required).
5. **Voters must be given a choice to use their VBM ballot without the envelope as a paper poll ballot instead of voting on a BMD or machine.**
 - Some counties will print the voter a blank paper ballot upon request. (Orange and Los Angeles are two of them.)
6. All ballots must remain secret and secure.
7. Booths and BMDs are to be arranged for **maximum voter privacy.**

8. Elections officials must wear an ID badge and be literate and fluent in English.
9. Voters may have someone of their choice assist them if they are unable to read or mark the ballot. Children may also accompany the voter. Otherwise, voters **must** vote **privately** and without consultation with others.
10. Voters may consult phones (no phone calls) or other devices as they vote.
11. Voters may not be in possession of 2 live ballots at once. If they have marked their mail-in ballot to use as a sample ballot, they must be required to photograph or otherwise copy the information and then surrender the live ballot before receiving another ballot or using the BMD.
12. Voters whose eligibility to vote cannot be immediately established must vote provisionally (ballot submitted in an envelope).
13. Unregistered individuals may register and vote conditionally (ballot submitted in an envelope).

Closing the Polls

1. Voters in line by closing time must be processed and allowed to vote, but no one arriving late may be allowed to vote or drop off a voted ballot.
2. After all voters have voted and left, Observers have the right to stay and to monitor closing activities.
3. Depending on county procedures, ballots may be removed from their containers, counted, sorted and re-sealed into transport containers.
4. Technology must be closed down, and numbers recorded and sealed per county regulations. Workers will be busy accomplishing assigned tasks, but you have the right to ask questions regarding the proceedings, as long as you do not interfere.
5. All live ballots and micro-chips containing votes must be sealed into transport containers and taken via 2-person chain of custody to the counting center or a near-by collection center for transport.
6. **Following that vehicle to its destination is a wise use of Observer time and effort.**

There is more to come in the next articles, but we are hopeful that you have gained some useful knowledge with this present one, as well as motivation to participate when and where you can as a well-informed citizen Observer.

As we have said previously, EIPCa looks forward to hearing encouraging reports that California citizens stepped up in heroic numbers and provided the oversight all elections deserve.

EIPCa looks forward to providing you

assistance and advice through our HOTLINES.

**EIPCa wishes you an
encouraging, productive and satisfying election season.**

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