

Adopted: March 26, 1998
Claim: CSM-3713-PGA-1
Staff: Steve Zimmerman
f:\mandates\pah\3713\scedoc.doc

Item 6

PROPOSED STATEWIDE COST ESTIMATE

Elections Code Section 3003
Chapter 77, Statutes of 1978
Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994

Absentee Ballots

Executive Summary

This proposed statewide cost estimate is for Elections Code section 3003, as added by Chapter 77, Statutes of 1978 and amended by Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994. The amendment adds school districts as eligible claimants under this mandate.

The statewide cost estimate is derived from data obtained through a survey of county election officials. Data on school district elections on fiscal issues was obtained from School Services of California and was used to validate parts of the survey data.

The estimate is made up of:

- Billed costs -- costs actually billed to school districts for absentee ballots by counties; and
- Calculated costs -- costs which represent the portion of reported total school district costs attributable to absentee ballots.

Calculated costs are used for counties where the survey data did not contain actual billed costs. Staff did not project costs for counties that did not respond to the survey letter or were not surveyed.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt this proposed statewide cost estimate in the amount of \$1,215,000 for the costs incurred complying with the provisions set forth in Elections Code section 3003, as amended by Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994, as follows:

Fiscal Year	Billed Costs	Calculated Costs	Total Costs
<u>Surveyed Costs:</u>			
1996-97	171,097	383,472	\$554,569
1997-98	105,456		\$105,456
<u>Projected Costs:</u>			
1998-99	171,097	383,472	\$554,569
Total:			\$1,214,594

Because the reported costs are prior to audit and based on estimates, the statewide cost estimate of \$1,214,594 has been rounded to \$1,215,000.

STATEWIDE COST ESTIMATE CALCULATION

Elections Code Section 3003
Chapter 77, Statutes of 1978
Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994

Absentee Ballots

Mandate Background

Elections Code section 3003 as added by Chapter 77, Statutes of 1978 and amended by Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994, requires absentee ballots be available to any registered voter. Under prior-law, absentee ballots were provided only when the following conditions were met:

- a. illness
- b. absence from precinct at day of election
- e. physical handicap
- d. conflicting religious commitments
- e. voter's residence is more than ten miles from his polling place

Departmental Recommendations

The Department of Finance recommendation was not received by Friday, March 13, 1998.

Reimbursable Costs

A Scope of Mandate

Any local agency or school district that administers an election program shall be reimbursed for the costs to provide absentee ballots to any registered voter on request.

B. Reimbursable Activities

Chapter 77, Statutes of 1978, as amended by Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994, mandated an increased level of service for local agencies, special districts and school districts that administer election programs.

When county election officials provide election services to other local agencies and school districts, the costs of those services which are billed to local agencies and school districts pursuant to the Uniform District Election Law (Elections Code section 10500 et seq.) shall not be included in the county's reimbursement claim.

Consequently, the parameters and guidelines shall provide reimbursement only for costs associated with the increase in absentee ballot filings, as determined under the formulas contained in the adopted parameters and guidelines.

Source of Data

In developing this statewide cost estimate, staff obtained data by sending a survey letter to county election officials in 28 counties. We note that 20 of the 28 counties responded to the letter. This data was used to determine the surveyed costs billed to school districts by county election officials and to calculate the projected costs which would be experienced by school districts when the county election official did not provide costs billed to school districts for absentee ballots.

Data on school district elections on various school district fiscal issues (general obligation bonds, parcel taxes, and similar fiscal issues) was obtained from the School Services of California web site. This data was used to check parts of the data provided in response to the survey letter. A complete check was not possible because School Services does not maintain data on school board member elections.

The reimbursement period for this mandate begins July 1, 1996 for school districts.

Assumptions

1. The costs experienced for providing these mandated program activities are similar for all counties.
2. The billed costs reported by the county election officials having such data are representative of costs which will be billed to school districts for future elections.
3. Many school districts will file reimbursement claims for this mandate if the absentee ballot costs are itemized on a billing from the county election official.
4. The January 26, 1996 county voter registration data published by the Secretary of State continues to accurately depict voter registration patterns in the state.
5. The projected costs for the 1998-99 fiscal year are assumed to be similar to those for the 1996-97 fiscal year. No rate of increase is predicted, due to lack of more recent voter registration data.

Methodology

The cost reported in the surveys fall into two categories. These are absentee ballot costs reported as billed to school districts by county election officials (billed costs) and absentee ballot costs which were calculated by the staff on the basis of the total reported school district costs and the countywide absent voter percentage. We note that these costs are unaudited.

The surveyed counties reported the number of registered voters and the number of absentee ballots for recent general and school district elections. The number of absentee ballots was divided by the number of registered voters to obtain the absentee ballot percentage for the county.

If the county election official reported only total school district costs for each election, the total school district cost was multiplied by the absentee ballot percentage to obtain the calculated absentee ballot costs for each school district.

Data obtained from the School Services of California web site indicates that the survey responses are an adequate representation of the costs that will be claimed by school districts under this mandate. However, since the School Services web site does not cover school board member elections, we are unable to validate that aspect of the survey.

Moreover, since many of the 1997-98 school district elections will be held in March, April, or June of 1998, we have no data on which to base an estimate of these costs. Based on our review of the survey data and the School Services data, we conclude that the costs claimed by school districts may be higher than this estimate.

Data from the Secretary of State's published report on voter registrations in California showed:

- Counties providing data on billed school district absentee ballot costs for 1996-97 elections represented 9.6 percent of the total registered voters in California;
- Counties providing data from which staff calculated school district absentee ballot costs for 1996-97 elections represented 25.3 percent of the total registered voters in California;
- Counties providing data on billed school district absentee ballot costs for the 1997-98 elections represented 8.3 percent of the total registered voters in California.

The projected costs for the 1998-99 fiscal year were assumed to be the same as the 1996-97 fiscal year costs. Due to lack of more recent voter registration data, no attempt was made to adjust the 1998-99 projections for changes in voter registration.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt this proposed statewide cost estimate in the amount of \$1,215,000 for the costs incurred complying with the provisions set forth in Elections Code section 3003, as amended by Chapter 920, Statutes of 1994.

Billed and calculated costs from the surveyed counties for each fiscal year are:

Fiscal Year	Billed Costs	Calculated Costs	Total Costs
<u>Surveyed Costs:</u>			
1996-97	171,097	383,472	\$554,569
1997-98	105,456	(none)	\$105,456
<u>Projected Costs:</u>			
1998-99	171,097	383,472	\$554,569
Total:			\$1,214,594

Because the reported costs are prior to audit and based on estimates, the statewide cost estimate of \$1,214,594 has been rounded to \$1,215,000.