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RESOLUTION NO. 19-119

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COUNTY OF EL PASO, STATE OF COLORADO

**RESOLUTION TO TAKE OFFICIAL POSITION OF SUPPORT OR
OPPOSITION TO STATE LEGISLATION**

WHEREAS, pursuant to C.R.S. §§ 30-11-101(1), 30-11-103, and 30-11-107(1), the Board of County Commissioners of El Paso County, Colorado (hereinafter "Board") has the legislative authority to manage the business and concerns of the County as deemed by the Board to be in the best interests of the citizens of El Paso County; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado Constitution places the power to make and enact laws with the Colorado General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the Board finds it both necessary and important to be engaged during each legislative session to ensure that legislators are making decisions and enacting laws that are in the best interest of El Paso County and the State of Colorado; and

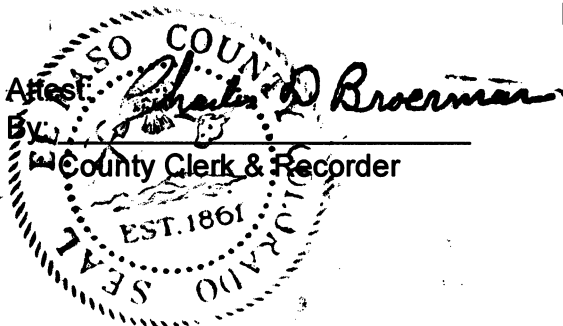
WHEREAS, the Board, in its capacity as duly elected representatives of the citizens of El Paso County, may take an official position of support or opposition on legislation introduced in the Colorado General Assembly, when that legislation may have a specific impact on County operations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the El Paso Board of County Commissioners by the authority granted the Board by the laws of the State of Colorado and the people of El Paso County, Colorado that we hereby declare our opposition to House Bill 19-1278 and approve the attached letter of opposition.

DONE THIS 16th day of April 2019, at Colorado Springs, Colorado.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF EL PASO COUNTY, COLORADO

By: 
Mark Waller, Chair



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COMMISSIONERS:
MARK WALLER (CHAIR)
LONGINOS GONZALEZ, JR. (VICE-CHAIR)

HOLLY WILLIAMS
STAN VANDERWERF
CAMI BREMER

EL PASO BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Dear Honorable Legislators,

We respectfully address the committee as the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners, Colorado's largest county. Our Clerk and Recorder's Election Department has received awards for their innovative and professional conduct of elections. With this exemplary department's proven expertise taken under advisement, we are confident in our analysis of HB19-1278. After a thorough review of the proposed modifications to the current election system, we join all 64 Colorado County Clerks in opposing the bill.

Nationwide Colorado is recognized as the paradigm for the integrity of verifiable, accurate, transparent elections. Our system is lauded for its security and functionality, which assuage concerns of citizens. It is the benchmark to ensure voters are fully enfranchised.

While we welcome suggestions of modifications that would strengthen the system, those proposed in HB19-1278 would decrease efficiency and weaken the structure by over-extending the resources required to successfully conduct an election. These include unfunded mandates for additional Voter Service and Polling Centers, ballot drop boxes, staffing, capital equipment and programming. The disciplined, controlled methodology of our current system would be susceptible to inefficacious operations and put Colorado's reputation in jeopardy.

First and foremost, the passage of HB13-1303 established Colorado as a mail ballot election state. Colorado now has an enviable voter turnout rate due to the ease and convenience of conducting elections by mail. Our system affords voters the opportunity to have time to research candidates, issues and questions on their ballot, vote in privacy and simply drop off or mail back their ballot.

Voter Service and Polling Centers are intended for people who need to register, update their records, return their ballot or other election services. While voting in person is also available, the VSPC does not function as the traditional "polling place". A voter can utilize *any* VSPC. Let us emphasize, Colorado is a mail ballot state. The current required number of VSPC locations is sufficient and their operational schedule more than adequate to allow voters who make time management their responsibility to receive service without long waits.

The premise of this bill is that lines at VSPCs were long. The fact is only a small number of locations statewide (6%) had lines that were over 30 minutes. The few locations which did have lines experienced them only the last 2-3 hours on Election Day, after several weeks and after hundreds of hours of availability with extremely low volume. While increasing the number of VSPCs and other proposed modifications may marginally decrease wait times, the resulting financial expenditures would increase substantially.

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The County Clerks recognize the main source of lines on Election Day stems from the limitations of the SCORE application for in-person processing of voters. The average time to process a voter is 6-7 minutes, compared to 90 seconds in Ohio and Florida. By giving the Secretary of State's Office the authority and financial resources to develop a stronger, more reliable SCORE application, the frontline election administrators can better serve voters.

Implementing HB19-1278 would cost taxpayers statewide \$6 million. In El Paso County, the expenditure would be \$1-\$1.7 million. The extreme increase to election funding will threaten the financial capability of counties to provide all the other varied services to their citizens. County budgets do not have the capacity to sustain the increased levels of expenditures that would result from the implementation of this bill. Individual counties should determine action to improve their individual systems in a more cost-efficient, sustainable manner.

Among concerns of the bill:

Staffing and Extended Hours – It is already difficult to identify and employ qualified judges with aggressive recruitment. The proposed 30-50% increase in VSPC locations would make it almost impossible for counties to meet staffing levels. Extending Election Day voting hours to 6 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. will put extreme stress on staff members who are already working nearly 120 hours a week and on Election Day are processing incoming ballots long after the end of voting. They will understandably be fatigued and these extended hours increase the chance of errors and could erode the public's confidence in the accuracy of our system.

Voter Service and Polling Center Location Acquisition – Already it is a challenge to meet requirements (ADA access and parking, proximity to public transit, security, network access). The inventory of public space is limited and increasing the number mandated would further aggravate the situation. We need a mandate to use public-funded spaces in order to meet the bill's requirements.

Drop Box Locations – For most counties the identification and acquisition of additional drop box locations is both difficult to obtain and expensive. The average cost per ballot box with utilities, lights, camera and digital storage is \$10-12K and for El Paso County the total cost to implement the bill's mandate is \$340K.

We are proud of the elections conducted by El Paso County which are reflected in the State of Colorado's impressive reputation as being the nation's most respected election system. Modifications to our current system should improve and enhance the operational and security functions of elections. The proposals in HB19-1278 do not accomplish that goal. Instead, the bill is convoluted and introduces unfunded mandates that will impact the ability for counties to serve their citizens, with the burden of cost falling on taxpayers.

The El Paso County Board of County Commissioners encourages the State Legislature to reject HB19-1278.

On behalf of The Board of County Commissioners of El Paso County, Colorado.



Mark Waller, Chair



Longinos Gonzalez, Jr., Vice Chair



Holly Williams, Member



Stan VanderWerf, Member



Cami Bremer, Member