

# OC supervisors reject cost-saving, easy-voting centers

*Southern California Public Radio*

Orange County will not be adopting a new voting system designed to make it easier for the county's 1.2 million voters to cast a ballot. This week the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously against adopting a voting center model for elections proposed by county Registrar of Voters Neal Kelley.

Under the model, neighborhood precincts would have been replaced with fewer, but larger and better-staffed vote centers where anyone could vote or drop off their mail-in ballot for up to 10 days before Election Day.

Kelley's [report](#) on the proposal noted that vote centers would eliminate the need to provide and account for provisional ballots for people voting at the wrong polling station, and it would allow poll workers to quickly verify the identity of voters via electronic poll books.

The system was expected to cost up to \$14 million, compared to up to \$40 million that Kelley estimated is needed to replace the county's outdated voting machines.

"It looked like a very efficient, cost-effective model to move towards," he told KPCC.

Still, the five Republican board members voted against the measure at their recent meeting without discussing it publicly or explaining the reasoning behind their votes. None of the supervisors responded to requests for comments on Wednesday.

Supervisor Todd Spitzer [told the Orange County Register](#) that he was concerned about potential voter fraud and said he wanted to evaluate other statewide changes to voting in 2018, including [same-day voter registration](#), before making additional changes.

California Secretary of State Alex Padilla said he was "stunned and deeply disappointed" by the board of supervisors' vote. Padilla sponsored a bill, [AB 450](#), designed to phase in the vote center model across the state.

"The Orange County Board of Supervisors had an opportunity to, frankly, be a leader in the state and across the country in empowering their voters with choices of when, where and how to cast a ballot and, by the way, save significant money in the process, and they chose not to do that," Padilla said.

Counties that adopt the vote center model will mail ballots to all registered voters before election day. Voters can mail in their ballots, drop them off at vote centers or vote in person at any vote center in the county.

Most Republican legislators voted against the bill, which Governor Jerry Brown signed into law in September.

Sacramento County recently adopted the vote center model, and Secretary of State

Padilla said he expects more to follow.

Colorado began implementing vote centers across the state several years ago, and seven other states besides California, including Texas and Arkansas, allow for vote centers to be used before and on election day, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#).

Justin Levitt, an expert on voting at Loyola Law School, said the vote center model should increase turnout by making it more convenient for people to vote.

“The vote center model is based on bringing the polls to voters rather than bringing voters to the polls,” he said. “It makes sure people can show up and cast their ballots where they wish ... rather than forcing people to go to a particular location at a time that’s not particularly convenient.”

He said there’s no more risk of fraud under the voting center model than under the current model.

The Pew Charitable Trusts found that Colorado counties [using vote centers](#) in the 2014 general election spent 40 percent less per vote than under its prior precinct model and the use of provisional ballots declined by nearly 98 percent. The study didn't address fraud.

An Orange County grand jury released a [report](#) earlier this year that found “no evidence of widespread or organized voter fraud or vote interference in Orange County election processes.”

The grand jury also concluded that vote centers as contemplated under AB 450 "will promote voter turnout, provide longer timeframes for ballot casting, maintain the security of the voting process, and preserve election integrity in the years ahead."