



TESTIMONY

House Committee on Elections
Interim Charge #2
August 26, 2010

The League of Women Voters of Texas has a long history of working to increase voter participation in Texas and supporting laws that make it easier for Texans to vote.

The early concept of super precincts, or voting centers, was developed to supplement precinct voting and expand voter participation by giving voters more places to vote on Election Day. Voters who are unable to vote in their local precinct would be allowed to vote at these super precincts on Election Day. For busy families whose schedules didn't allow them the flexibility to vote before or after work, providing conveniently located super precincts may enable many people to vote who otherwise could not. Super precincts have the potential to benefit a large percentage of Texas voters, and would reduce the need for provisional ballots on Election Day for voters who show up in the wrong precinct.

Texas voters have gotten used to early voting at super-precinct-like polling places and have clearly demonstrated their satisfaction with that option. Early voting in some cities is approaching 70% of the total number of ballots cast. Super precincts on Election Day would give added flexibility to Election Day voters.

While the League sees the potential of bringing new voters to polls, we also have concerns.

- Counties, in an understandable quest to save money, may attempt to use super precincts only as a cost saving measure. Current law pertaining to super precincts allows counties to cut up to 35% of their local precincts and replace them with super precincts. New laws must address the needs of voters who have no viable means to reach a voting center.
- Voters must receive ample notification if their poll is designated for closure.
- Communities must be involved in super precinct placement and poll closure decisions. County officials must make these decisions in an open forum.
- Further, communities whose needs are not considered in this planning process must be given recourse directly to their elected representatives.

Overall, centralized voting must not be permitted to disenfranchise poor, disabled, or elderly voters, or any person without viable transportation.

Along with super precincts, voter enfranchising options should also include no-excuse mail-in ballots and free bus transportation to voting centers.

We urge the Texas Legislature to thoroughly review the counties that have participated in the super precincts pilot program and to insure that all the problems related to implementation are solved before expanding the law to the entire state. We also urge the Texas Legislature to

require counties that implement super precincts to conduct extensive voter education and outreach, so that voters are not caught off guard on Election Day and lose their opportunity to vote.

Addendum:

The first Vote Center was implemented in Larimer County Colorado in 2003
http://www.co.larimer.co.us/elections/votecenters_history.htm

National LWV support for Voting Centers in Larimer County (2005)
http://www.co.larimer.co.us/elections/Kay_Maxwell_LWV.pdf