MEMORANDUM

Date: January 20, 2022

To: The Honorable Chair and Members   From: Jan Lesher
        Pima County Board of Supervisors   Acting County Administrator

Re: **Proposal to Use Electronic Polling Books, Ballot Printers and Voting Centers in 2022 Election**

The Arizona Legislature in 2011 authorized the use of electronic poll books for determining voter eligibility at polling locations and also provided for voting centers in lieu of precinct-restricted election-day voting. Since then, 11 of Arizona's 15 counties have adopted voting centers as their preferred method of conducting Election Day polling, including Maricopa County, which switched in 2020. All Arizona counties except Pima County use e-poll books. Arizona is one of 18 states that allows for voting centers.

A voting center cuts the bonds of precinct-only voting. Instead, voters on Election Day can go to any center that's convenient to them in the County, and through the use of e-poll books and new ballot printers, vote a ballot that is specific to their precinct and the associated jurisdictions in which they live.

The Pima County Recorder and County Elections have been reviewing the use of vote centers in other counties the past few elections and this past November conducted a test of the e-poll books and vote center process in the Vail School District budget override election with the district's support. The test went smoothly, with no major problems arising. The Recorder's Office and Elections Department have collaborated with their counterparts in other counties regarding areas of concern and how best to address those issues.

The Recorder and County Elections would now like the Board of Supervisors to consider implementing the new process countywide for the 2022 primary and general elections. The use of e-poll books and vote centers were first proposed to the Elections Integrity Committee at its November meeting and the concerns committee members brought up then will be addressed at its January 21 meeting.

Below is a brief description of the process and a summary of the benefits and concerns of switching to voting centers.

More accurate, fewer provisional ballots

The current process of verifying a voter at a precinct on Election Day involves the use of printed polling books. Two full weeks prior to Election Day for the upcoming election, the Recorder generates the data and starts to print out the registered voter rosters and registers for all 232 polling places. Four copies of each register and one copy of the roster are printed

Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **Proposal to Use Electronic Polling Books, Ballot Printers and Voting Centers in 2022 Election**
January 20, 2022
Page 2

and quality control checked for each polling location. The Elections Department then assembles them in binders for distribution to the polling places. By Election Day, the data in the registers and rosters is two weeks old, which means any changes to a voter's registration status after the books were assembled – for instance, a voter moves to another part of town and a new precinct and updates their registration – are not reflected in the printed polling rosters. This creates conflict with some voters and often results in a voter having to vote a provisional ballot. In 2020 and 2018, there were more than 18,000 provisional ballots cast in those elections, and more than 21,000 in 2016. The Recorder estimates the use of e-poll books would reduce this number in the 2024 election by more than 80 percent. Provisional ballots are verified last after Election Day and take the longest to complete, making the verification cost per ballot nearly four to five times the cost to verify late Early Ballots. Fewer provisional ballots to verify will speed the completion of the election.

With e-poll books, a voter will go to any vote center, present their ID and a vote center staff member will use the e-poll book to scan the driver's license, which is the most common form of identification, and bring up the voter's information. Allowable alternative forms of identification can also be used to find the voter. The system will then send the voter's information to a ballot printer which will print a ballot specific to the precinct in which the voter lives. The data in the e-poll book database will be up to date, reducing the incidence of any conflict or confusion with the voter. In every election, thousands of voters go to the wrong polling place and seek to vote. Most dislike having to leave and go somewhere else. Most end up casting a provisional ballot. Because of this confusion, there are hundreds of ballots cast by legal voters each year that are not counted because the vote was cast in the wrong place. Vote centers eradicates this situation.

Ballot printers mean no uncast extra ballots and better ballot security

To make sure each precinct has enough ballots for Election Day under the current process, the Elections Department delivers enough blank ballots to account for high turnout and any contingencies. At the end of Elections Day in every recent election there are tens of thousands of blank, unused ballots in the County's possession. These pose an election security risk and there are strict procedures for securing and accounting for them. The use of ballot printers eliminates this risk. The only ballots that get printed are the ones the voters cast. There are no extra, blank ballots. In the 2020 General Election, the cost of unused ballots was more than $86,000.

The software on the e-poll book does not allow ballots to be printed independently of a voter being checked in. The print command is initiated from the e-poll book only after the voter has checked in and signed the screen. Then a command can be sent for only one specific ballot to be printed. There is no way to send a command to print multiple ballots. The poll pad is designed to lead a user to a specific task; commands and options are only available when they are needed. This format prevents users from printing ballots unintentionally. Further, the poll worker initiating the print command is not the poll worker retrieving the ballots from the printer.

Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **Proposal to Use Electronic Polling Books, Ballot Printers and Voting Centers in 2022 Election**
January 20, 2022
Page 3

The overriding security feature for precinct-based or vote center polling places is that if the number of ballots received at Central Count on election night does not match the number of voters who signed the roster or the e-poll book, the ballots are not counted until the discrepancy is resolved.

Most voters vote by mail

Turnout on Election Day has been dropping for nearly two decades since the state expanded eligibility for early voting. The 2020 election had historic participation with more than 526,000 voters casting ballots, 87 percent of them by early ballot. Just 66,500 or so voters went to the 232 polling places on November 3, 2020. That's an average of about 290 voters per polling place, or 22 an hour over the 13-hour period when polls are open. In the past few elections, some precincts have had periods where hours went by with no voters, leaving paid polling staff with little to do.

The pandemic likely played a role in the high percentage of early ballots in 2020, but early ballot percentages were similar in the 2018 and 2016 elections, with 79 percent of voters casting an early ballot in 2018, and 75 percent in 2016.

Early voting is popular throughout Arizona, and despite recent rhetoric from certain political quarters, it is unlikely to be significantly changed this Legislative session. However, if it is curtailed in some manner, it may increase the number of voters casting ballots on Election Day. Vote centers will better handle this increase in Election Day voting than at the numerous precincts and make voting easier for voters who have become accustomed to early voting.

No effect on counting process and security

Once a voter gets their ballot at the vote center, the process of voting and voting security used in past elections remains the same. The state's rules for voter ID also remain the same.

Significant cost savings and better for voters

The use of electronic polling books, ballot printers, and vote centers will provide considerable cost savings for the County for conducting elections, more than $200,000 a year (this excludes the cost of purchasing the new voting equipment). The County will need only half the number of poll workers typically needed to staff 232 polling places and only half the number of people who work on election night. Fewer provisional ballots will be cast, reducing the costs of verification. And the County won't have to pay for thousands of ballots that don't get voted.

But more importantly, the new system will make it easier for voters to cast ballots on Election Day and reduce instances of voter confusion. Every Election Day, the Recorder's and the Elections Department's websites and call centers are deluged by voters trying to figure out where to vote. They currently only have one choice – their precinct polling location. With vote centers, voters will have about 100 locations to choose from. Voters could go to a

Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **Proposal to Use Electronic Polling Books, Ballot Printers and Voting Centers in 2022 Election**
January 20, 2022
Page 4

voting location near their work or near their home. They wouldn't have to drive past locations that are not their assigned polling location, which leads to voter frustration and confusion. The Recorder and the Communications Office will conduct a large education campaign beginning this summer and lasting through Nov. 8 to make sure voters are well informed about where they can vote August 2 and November 8. This will include a webpage with a searchable, easy-to-use map of vote centers.

Concerns

Vote centers have had enormous success in most states and counties that have adopted them. However, some voting rights organizations have noted that in some counties elsewhere in the country there were significant equity issues in which more vote centers were in mostly white and affluent suburbs than in communities with lower incomes and high percentages of persons of color. As a result, the urban voting centers often had long lines and wait-times to cast a ballot.

County Administration, the Elections Department, and the County Recorder are committed to ensuring those types of equity issues do not occur in Pima County. The Elections Department has created criteria for vote center location that ensures everyone in the County will have easy access to a vote center. The criteria includes that vote center locations must be in a building that is ADA compliant for accessibility and be approximately 2,000 square feet to accommodate voters. In lower income areas some of the vote centers are smaller, however, there are more locations and they are along bus routes. The Elections Department didn't make any changes to voting locations in very rural areas, including the Tohono O'Odham Nation. In other words, the vote centers will be at the same sites used in previous elections.

Timeline

The Recorder and the Elections Department will present the use of e-poll books, ballot printers, and Vote centers to the Election Integrity Commission at its Jan. 21 meeting. The Communications Office will publicize the meeting and livestream it to YouTube.

At the Board's February 15 meeting, the Recorder will present a request to purchase e-poll books and ask the Board for its initial approval of using Voting Centers for the 2022 election.

JL

c: The Honorable Gabriella Cázares-Kelly, Pima County Recorder
       Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
       Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
         Health and Community Services
       Mary Martinson, Interim Director, Elections Department