Numbered Memo 2019-06

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director
RE: Minimum Number of Ballots for Municipal Elections
DATE: September 23, 2019

Previous guidance required county boards of elections to prepare ballots in a number at least equal to 50% of the number of registered voters in the county prior to that election or primary. For municipal primaries and elections, county boards of elections are now required to prepare ballots in a number at least equal to 50% of eligible voters per ballot style. The reason for this change is to tailor the number of ballots prepared to the relative size of the electorate, reducing cost for county boards of elections and municipalities where possible while ensuring a sufficient supply of ballots. This change may be helpful for counties in which, for example, a contest covers only a small portion of the electorate for that election, or where a contest for mayor is citywide but the city council districts run separately.

Alternatively, the county board of elections may still prepare ballots in a number at least equal to 50% of the number of registered voters in the county prior to that election or primary if desired.

If voter turnout in either of the past two similar municipal elections was greater than 50%, then the minimum number of ballots required to be prepared is the higher turnout from the previous two municipal elections plus 10%. For example, if voter turnout in the 2017 municipal election was 55%, the county board of elections is required to prepare ballots in a number at least equal to 65% of the number of registered voters in the county prior to the current municipal election.

Counties that use direct record electronic (DRE) voting systems may request to reduce their required number of ballots by the number of projected DRE ballots to be cast based on previous similar elections. Requests for reduction in the required number of ballots should include the justification for the reduction and any relevant data from previous similar elections.

County boards should exercise sound judgment, including reviewing turnout in similar past elections, in determining the number of ballot styles to prepare and the distribution of ballots by ballot styles among voting locations. The distribution of ballots to Election Day precincts should take into account the turnout at one-stop locations during that primary or election.