



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

Legislation Text

File #: 21-944, Version: 1

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Clerk/Recorder

Agenda Section: Public Hearing

SUBJECT:

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive staff report;
2. Open public hearing and accept public comment;
3. Introduce Ordinance No. ____ by title and receive the first reading of the ordinance;
4. Close public hearing; and,
5. Direct Clerk of the Board to post the summary for publication in the office of the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors for at least five (5) days prior to the Board of Supervisors meeting at which the proposed ordinance is to be adopted.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund Budget Unit 1100 140

DISCUSSION:

Background

The California Political Reform Act of 1974 (PRA) (Government Code, Sections 84100-84511) requires the filing of campaign disclosure statements, including but not limited to local candidates for elective office, or those supporting or opposing local candidates or ballot measures. The PRA also requires all elected and appointed officials and designated employees to file Statements of Economic Interests (Form 700) (Government Code, Sections 87100-87505). Since the enactment of the PRA, candidates and political committees have complied with filing requirements by filing paper copies of campaign statements and reports with the Office of Elections. In recent years, the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) established a voluntary electronic reporting system for certain elected offices under Government Code, Section 87200.

Beginning January 1, 2013, Assembly Bill 2452 (Government Code, Section 84615-84616) authorizes local government agency filing officers to require online or electronic filing for elected seats, candidates, committees, or other persons who are required to file statements, reports, or other documents under the PRA when funds received or expended total \$2,000 within a calendar year. Since

passage, many local government agencies throughout California have chosen to enact paperless filing. The FPPC supports and encourages efforts to move from a paper-based reporting system to a more transparent electronic system.

Campaign Finance

The Office of Elections is the campaign finance reporting filing officer for the County of Humboldt for 14 elected county seats, 30 school districts, 44 special districts, 15 general purpose committees, and local measure committees. Currently, Elections tracks filer reporting and maintains electronic records manually. Filings are tracked in a spreadsheet and notifications are sent individually to filers through a manual process. Paper filings require manual processes such as scanning, auditing for errors and omissions, and maintaining hard copy records. Elections may receive and process hundreds of filings in a reporting period.

Beginning January 1, 2021, AB 2151 requires local government agencies to post redacted copies of campaign statements and reports on their agency's website within 72 hours of each applicable filing deadline if filed in paper format. Currently, Elections manually scans copies of paper filings to create redacted electronic copies of campaign financial reports and manually uploads these records to Elections' website. Manual administration of the county's campaign finance reporting prohibits the Office of Elections from accepting electronically signed and filed documents from filers.

Public access to campaign finance information is a vital and integral component of a fully informed electorate. Transparency in campaign financing is critical to maintain public trust and support of the political process.

Statements of Economic Interests (Form 700)

The Office of Elections is the Form 700 reporting filing officer for 14 elected county seats, 52 appointed county seats, approximately 220 school district seats, approximately 150 special district seats, and candidates filing declaration of candidacy. Currently, Elections tracks filer reporting manually. Manual administration of the county's Form 700 reporting prohibits the Office of Elections from accepting electronically filings from filers.

The FPPC is the authority for approving and certifying electronic systems for Form 700. The Form 700 electronic filing component does not require an ordinance by law to implement; however, it is recommended that the County of Humboldt adopt electronic filing of Form 700 by ordinance to require filers to submit the form electronically to ensure compliance with timely filing and improve accuracy in filed statements.

Benefits of Electronic Filing

The Office of Elections continues to find ways to provide quality customer service to filers and the public, streamline processes to maximize efficiency, and increase public transparency. Electronic filing makes it easier for officials to comply with reporting obligations and provides the public with information in a more accessible, transparent, and consistent format. In other jurisdictions, use of an electronic filing system has shown to increase compliance and timely filing, likely due to the automated reminders and messaging programmed into the system, and reduce the number of

amendments submitted, attributable to the system guidance as each section of disclosure forms are completed to ensure information is not omitted. Additionally, an electronic system reduces paper waste and time spent processing and storing paper filings, enabling elections staff to focus efforts on assisting filers comply with filing requirements. Establishing an electronic reporting system provides many benefits to filers and the county. If a filer does not possess the equipment to file electronically, the Office of Elections will work with the filer to obtain access to Elections' electronic filing system.

Selecting a Vendor

On June 5, 2018, County Administrative Office - Information Technology (CAO-IT) received approval from the Board of Supervisors to enter into a service agreement with Granicus for its web-based public meeting software. The Office of Elections worked with CAO-IT and Granicus to amend this existing agreement to include the CampaignDocs and DisclosureDocs modules; your Board signed the contract amendment on June 3, 2021, and approved a subsequent appropriation fund transfer for purchase of the Granicus CampaignDocs and DisclosureDocs modules on June 15, 2021.

Granicus is a web-based vendor-hosted application that utilizes "industry best practices" for securing data. Filers will be able to electronically sign and file campaign finance reports, and file Form 700 filings safely and securely. Filers will not be charged a service or use fee. The electronic reporting system provides a module for the public to view filings, increasing transparency and reducing staff costs incurred by manually scanning, saving, and uploading filings to Elections' website individually. Granicus offers a one-on-one training with filers.

Public Comment

As of the writing of this agenda item, the Office of Elections has not received any public comment. However, staff anticipates receiving public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this agenda item. Such comments will be provided to the Board of Supervisors as supplemental materials prior to or during the public hearing. In addition, public comments may be offered during the public comment portion of this item.

Public Notice

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act as was available for public viewing and review for at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The financial impact of this ordinance on the General Fund is minimal. Original cost of the Granicus CampaignDocs and DisclosureDocs for FY 2021-22 was \$17,818. Efficiencies realized by employing an electronic filing system for campaign filing and Form 700 filing will reduce staff costs for administering these services and necessity for amendments to be filed. Resulting staff salary savings will likely offset the purchase cost.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

This action supports your Board's Strategic Framework by providing community-appropriate levels of service, managing our resources to ensure sustainability of services, and fostering transparent, accessible, welcoming and user-friendly services.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
County Administrative Office - Information Technology
County Appointed Department Heads
County Elected Officials
School Districts
Special Districts
Political Parties
Political Committees

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board could choose not to adopt the proposed ordinance. Choosing not to adopt the proposed ordinance is not recommended. The county is legally required to make redacted copies of campaign finance documents available on its website. Finance reports and documents filed must be manually scanned, redacted, and posted to the county's website. The Granicus online reporting web platform provides filers the ability to electronically submit filings, which reduces time and staff costs associated with manual processing and increases public transparency.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Ordinance No. _____
Attachment 2: Summary for Publication Prior to Adoption of Ordinance
Attachment 3: Summary for Publication After Adoption of Ordinance
Attachment 4: Contract Amendment

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Board Order No.: C-10, C-9
Meeting of: June 5, 2018; June 15, 2021
File No.: 18-519, 21-635