



# **NVRA AGENCY-BASED VOTER REGISTRATION IN COLORADO**

## ***2009 ANNUAL REPORT***

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Expanding voter registration opportunities to citizens receiving public assistance in Colorado in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines procedures and other activities administered in compliance with Section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which requires that states offer voter registration services at agencies providing public assistance.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the NVRA states that agencies must provide and accept voter registration applications from anyone who applies for public assistance benefits, recertifies or renews benefits, or changes an address as related to their benefits.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the implementation of Colorado's renewed NVRA compliance plan implemented in 2008, emphasis on NVRA compliance was not maintained at a desirable level by the State of Colorado. Colorado has made significant strides in improving compliance over the past two years.

Because of Colorado's focus on renewed compliance and ongoing commitment to encourage voter registration, **applications generated through public assistance agencies in 2009 increased by 76% from the previous year and have increased more than 277% since 2007.** In the 2007 calendar year, county clerks reported 5,347 applications for registrations received from agencies covered under the NVRA. In 2009, the number of applications reported was 20,185. Because 2009 was not a federal election year, the Secretary of State expects this number to increase yet again in 2010. Detailed information regarding the number of voter registrations obtained from public assistance agencies in 2007, 2008, and 2009 is illustrated in Appendix A.

## COLORADO'S COMMITMENT TO SECTION 7 COMPLIANCE

In the first quarter of 2008, the Secretary of State's office conducted an independent review of available voter registration data, which suggested the need for a renewed education and compliance effort. The Secretary of State's office acted promptly to identify key stakeholders and specific areas of non-compliance and to develop a comprehensive plan to mitigate the issues identified. In drafting the plan, the Secretary of State addressed the need for improved communication and coordination with public assistance agencies and the issuance of advice to local agencies regarding their specific duties under the NVRA. The plan also called for the development of training materials and creation of a tracking system to record voter registrations statistics bi-monthly with a web-based survey program.

In the fall of 2009 the Secretary of State's office in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Human services began sending voter registration applications in the monthly renewal packets mailed to individuals who receive public assistance from DHS agencies. This action ensured that every applicant for renewal of services who did not appear in person at a local office received an opportunity to register to vote or to update their information. In addition, this centralized mailing approach removed the burden from local DHS offices that were previously required to mail the voter application separately to each person who did not apply in person for renewal. Approximately 25,000 voter registration applications are mailed each month. This mailing supplements, but does not supplant, the opportunity to register to vote when potential applicants apply for or renew services in-person.

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<sup>1</sup> 42 U.S.C. 1973gg(a)(1) and (3)

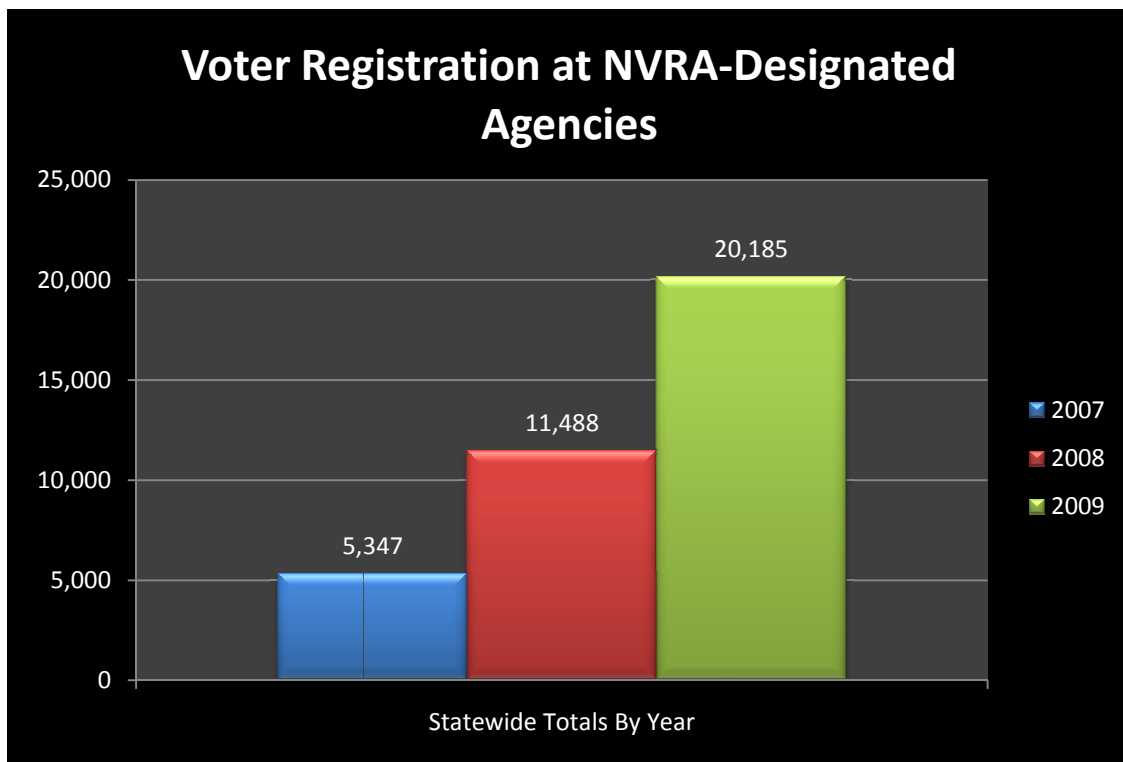
<sup>2</sup> See 42 U.S.C. 1973gg-5(a)(4)(A) and (a)(6)(A)

## COLORADO'S SUCCESS

Colorado's success in implementing an effective program to improve Section 7 compliance was enhanced by the partnership between the Secretary of State's office, the Department of Human Services, the WIC program, and local agencies. The partnership has resulted in stakeholders working together to increase awareness and improve compliance with Section 7 of the NVRA. While there has been some resistance to the renewed compliance efforts, the plan has resulted in a significant increase in agency registrations, including changes of address, throughout the state.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of electors that chose to register to vote or update their registration information at NVRA-designated agencies beginning in 2007. Data reflects registrations received by Colorado's County Clerks that were subsequently entered into the statewide voter registration database, known as SCORE.

*Fig. 1*



Instances of non-compliance, including inconsistent reporting, appear to primarily result from a lack of knowledge or understanding of agency responsibilities under Section 7. Specifically, there appears to have been confusion regarding the proper completion of the declination section of the voter registration application. In addition, agencies are operating with extremely limited staff resources due to the budgetary crisis. While Colorado continues to improve Section 7 compliance, there are still opportunities to further increase voter registration availability.

## FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Although tremendous gains have been made in Colorado's compliance with Section 7, there are continuing challenges facing the Secretary of State's office, Department of Human Services, WIC, and other public assistance agencies in meeting the needs of potential registrants. The current economic downturn has, and will continue to impact Colorado state government and public assistance agencies. Drastic revenue shortfalls and budget cuts have resulted in the Governor issuing a hiring freeze and furloughs at state agencies, which made it difficult for the Secretary of State's office to provide adequate resources to monitor compliance and seek new methods and technologies to effectively meet the needs of voter registration applicants. Colorado's local public assistance agencies are similarly challenged. With increased employee turnover and limited staff and departmental resources, it is difficult for many agencies to not only provide the basic services sought by clients, but to also meet Section 7 compliance.

Despite the challenges that the Secretary of State's office, WIC, and Department of Human Services are currently facing, the gains that have been achieved in past years in improving voter registration opportunities have been substantial. The statewide voter registration system (known as "SCORE") provides a well-developed system of evaluation and tracking for those voter registration applications transmitted from public assistance agencies to Colorado's county clerk and recorders. SCORE allows the state to compare the number of applications completed at agencies against the number of applications received by county clerk and recorders to identify and mitigate inconsistencies on an ongoing basis.

The enactment of House Bill 09-1160 requiring the implementation of online voter registration through the Secretary of State's website is a significant step that will provide an additional method for electors to register to vote. The Secretary of State's office anticipates partnering with Colorado's public assistance agencies to explore the viability of integrating online voter registration technology into each agency's current software system. The Secretary of State's office is optimistic that this technology will streamline agency-based voter registration procedures, promote voter convenience, create more accurate data, and reduce the amount of time needed for case managers to assist potential electors with completing voter registration applications. In addition, online voter registration may reduce language barriers, which result in incomplete voter registration forms. Although many agencies recognize the potential positive impacts of online voter registration, workload and fiscal limitations associated with the tracking of voter registrations through this technology is a concern that must be addressed.

In 2010 the Secretary of State's office intends to partner with stakeholders to launch a pilot program assessing feasibility and possible success of integrating online voter registration into local agencies using a voter registration kiosk environment. Preliminary discussions will begin in the spring of 2010 with the goal of initiating a pilot site in the 3rd quarter of the year.

The Secretary of State is also working to transition agency staff member training to a web-based environment so that training is consistent and easy to access, further ensuring that agency staff is aware of their responsibilities regarding section 7 compliance. Online training will also provide access to materials in any county in the state at a time that is most convenient for the office seeking training.

Despite the current and future challenges, the Secretary of State's office is committed to continuing to enhance voter registration opportunities for citizens applying for public assistance.

## CONCLUSION

The decisive action taken by the Secretary of State's office to maintain NVRA compliance in Colorado has resulted in an increase in Colorado's overall voter registration performance. However, opportunities for improved compliance remain. Although Colorado has increased voter registration in each of the past three years, incidents of inconsistent policies and reporting must be addressed and mitigated. Notwithstanding the fiscal challenges that the state is currently facing, significant improvements in the delivery of NVRA-mandated voter registration services have been realized. The Secretary of State's office is committed to continuing its partnership with the Department of Human Services, WIC, local public assistance agencies, and other stakeholders in an ongoing effort to improve and maintain compliance with the NVRA.

**APPENDIX A**  
**VOTER REGISTRATION TABLE**  
*2007-2009*

**Data presented in the following tables depict information reported by County Clerks and Recorders, as reflected in the statewide voter registration database. While every effort has been made to ensure that accurate data is presented, in some cases data may contain anomalies.**

**Voter registration statistics from electors who register at NVRA-designated agencies are separately tracked in the SCORE voter registration database by use of a coding system that captures the location where each voter registration application originated. Prior to 2008, the Secretary of State had no role in overseeing proper categorization of registrations received from NVRA-designated agencies. The implementation of SCORE in 2008 provided standardization of coding and has assisted the Secretary of State with identifying and where applicable, correcting anomalies.**

**Contact the Secretary of State's office for more information about voter registration data.**

VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS RECEIVED FROM AGENCIES DESIGNATED UNDER THE NVRA  
2007 THROUGH 2009

Voter Registration Received From NVRA-Designated Agencies							
County	2007	2008	2009	County	2007	2008	2009
Adams	729	283	1,368	Kit Carson	0	19	4
Alamosa	66	139	82	La Plata	4	43	285
Arapahoe	270	1,797	2,303	Lake	3	2	25
Archuleta	0	2	1	Larimer	527	462	570
Baca	2	85	36	Las Animas	0	20	50
Bent	1	4	47	Lincoln	98	13	50
Boulder	6	3,575	422	Logan	22	27	139
Broomfield	385	82	152	Mesa	0	118	282
Chaffee	6	11	21	Moffat	0	64	55
Cheyenne	4	2	8	Montezuma	0	44	215
Clear Creek	4	4	35	Montrose	3	18	144
Conejos	14	32	17	Morgan	5	68	111
Costilla	16	5	86	Otero	20	58	33
Crowley	7	81	37	Ouray	0	31	29
Custer	0	2	7	Park	15	6	47
Delta	12	74	154	Phillips	85	37	17
Denver	280	21	7,601	Pitkin	0	7	17
Dolores	0	5	17	Prowers	29	36	47
Douglas	38	28	268	Pueblo	101	100	210
Eagle	2	65	199	Rio Blanco	0	17	13
El Paso	14	792	1,844	Rio Grande	0	111	97
Elbert	327	15	73	Routt	0	3	39
Fremont	51	21	155	Saguache	3	98	28
Garfield	45	18	65	San Juan	0	0	10
Gilpin	0	2	19	San Miguel	76	8	44
Grand	0	42	102	Sedgwick	9	14	8
Gunnison	0	112	41	Summit	0	39	246
Hinsdale	0	0	8	Teller	0	102	76
Huerfano	36	92	42	Washington	5	8	18
Jackson	0	3	7	Weld	0	35	405
Jefferson	19	87	1,553	Yuma	1	390	101
Kiowa	0	1	0	<b>Statewide Totals</b>	<b>2,334</b>	<b>7,482</b>	<b>20,185</b>