

# Analysis of Potential Change in Special District Elections

For the Health District of Northern Larimer County Board of Directors

---

**Issue Summary:** There is the potential that legislation will be filed next session to move special district elections from May to November. The Special District Association and others may do some lobbying this fall and winter in anticipation of such an occurrence. For that reason, the Board has indicated that they would like to see an analysis of the issue and consider putting together a general message on the topic.

**Date of Overview:** June 27, 2006

**Prepared by:** Carrie Cortiglio

---

## Background

At the end of the legislative session there was an attempt to amend SB06-170 to move elections for mental health districts from May to November. It is the understanding of staff that the reason for the amendment was to address complaints about election procedures in Aurora when the city held its election to establish a mental health district. The amendment was strongly opposed by the Council on Behavioral Healthcare (CBHC). The Health District joined CBHC in opposing the amendment and sent a letter to our delegation opposing the change.

## Past History

This analysis includes information that was prepared for the Board of Directors on similar bills from previous sessions. The last time the Board took a position on this issue was in 2003. There was legislation proposed (HB03-1171) that would move special district and municipal elections from May to November and prohibit the cancellation of November elections even when the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of vacancies. The bill was lost in House second reading. The Health District board of directors voted to strongly oppose HB03-1171.

Other organizations opposed to HB03-1171 included:

- The Special District Association of Colorado
- The Colorado Municipal League
- The Colorado School Board Association

## Why is this issue important?

The Health District has historically been interested in any legislation that amends the special district laws and has the potential to have a negative impact on the work we are able to do.

## Reasons to support bill:

- Moving elections from May to November will likely increase voter participation since voters will already be at the polls for the other issues on the ballot and local and statewide office elections.
- With more voters at the polls for special district elections there may be increased voter awareness of the work of the Health District and other special districts throughout the state.
- Moving all special district elections under the aegis and control of the county clerk's office may remove any questions by the public about the integrity of the election process, such as the questions that came up this year in Aurora.

## Reasons to oppose bill:

- Removes a special district's opportunity to choose which type of election to hold (mail or polling place). County clerks would handle this decision — and the election itself.
- Reduces special district opportunities to ask voters for bond changes and TABOR exemptions. Special districts, school districts and municipalities often time their bond requests with favorable interest rates; removing May as an option for bond changes may result in an unfavorable interest rate, and definitely reduces options in timing.

- Will make already long November ballots longer — according to the SDA, there are 75-80 special districts in Larimer County alone.
  - Bury special district elections and issues at the bottom of these long ballots (by law, special districts are last).
  - May increase voter participation to include voters who have no knowledge of either or both the special district and the candidate or issue before them.
  - Will decrease the media attention afforded our own (and other small) districts during elections. In past years, local media have endorsed Health District board candidates and printed candidate profiles during the election. This is unlikely to occur during a November election when special district issues compete with city, county and statewide issues and candidates.
  - May increase costs for some special districts, particularly those who opt for less expensive polling place elections (compared to mail ballots) and those with extremely small districts.
  - The new election responsibilities could prove very burdensome for county clerks.
- 

#### **About this Analysis**

This analysis was prepared by Health District of Northern Larimer County staff to assist the Health District Board of Directors in determining whether to take an official stand on various health-related issues. Analyses are based on bills or issues at the time of their consideration by the Board and are accurate to the best of staff knowledge. It is suggested that people check to see that a bill has not changed during the course of a legislative session by visiting the Colorado General Assembly web page at [www.state.co.us/gov\\_dir/stateleg.html](http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/stateleg.html). To see whether the Health District Board of Directors took a position on this or other policy issues, please visit [www.healthdistrict.org/policy](http://www.healthdistrict.org/policy).

#### **About the Health District**

The Health District is a special district of the northern two-thirds of Larimer County, Colorado, supported by local property tax dollars and governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Health District provides medical, mental health, dental, preventive and health planning services to the communities it serves.

For more information about this analysis or the Health District, please contact Carrie Cortiglio, Policy Coordinator, at (970) 224-5209, or e-mail at [ccortiglio@healthdistrict.org](mailto:ccortiglio@healthdistrict.org)