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February 16, 2018

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Passage of Local Election Act a Victory for New Mexico Voters

SANTA FE – New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver worked with Senator Daniel Ivey-Soto, Representative Paul Bandy, and bipartisan county clerks from across the state to push legislation that will consolidate nonpartisan local elections. House Bill 98, co-sponsored by Sen. Ivey-Soto and Rep. Bandy, passed both chambers of the state legislature this week with bipartisan support and now awaits the Governor's signature.

“Holding multiple elections every year is both costly for local governments and exhausting for voters,” said Secretary Toulouse Oliver. “If the Local Election Act becomes law I am confident we will see increased voter participation in nonpartisan local elections across the state and at significant savings to voters. I thank Senator Ivey-Soto, Representative Bandy, and supporters of this bill like Chaves County Clerk and New Mexico Clerk Affiliate Dave Kunko for their efforts to help secure a big victory for New Mexico voters. I will continue working to make it easier for eligible voters to cast a ballot.”

“I am excited the Local Election Act was passed. It is a good start for what we are trying to do, which is to make elections less confusing for voters. Consolidating nonpartisan local elections gives the voter access to one ballot with all the issues that apply to their districts, which will help election administrators provide better service to voters,” said Chaves County Clerk Dave Kunko. “I appreciate Secretary Toulouse Oliver for pushing to make this a reality for voters, and the bill's co-sponsors for all of their hard work.”

Currently, nonpartisan local elections are held at multiple times during the calendar year throughout the state. This often leads to confusion among voters who may not be aware that an election is happening in their community until it has already completed. As a result, there is often a very low turnout in school district and other local nonpartisan elections – sometimes totaling less than five percent of eligible voters. However, local governments still must spend significant funds in order to conduct their elections even with dismal voter turnout.

The Local Election Act proposes to amend substantial sections of the Election Code in order to consolidate the conduct of non-partisan local elections to be held on a single day and create uniform processes for the conduct of these elections. These elections could include the election of municipal officers, school board members, and officers for other special districts that have taxation authority. The ballot may also include bond questions and local mill levies for the voter's consideration. The consolidated local elections will be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of odd-numbered years.

The legislation also provides a provision for municipalities to opt in to the consolidated November election, otherwise municipal elections will be held in March. Those that do are required to conduct their elections pursuant to the statutory provisions of the Local Election Act in March of even-numbered years.

If signed by the governor, the first consolidated local election will occur in November 2019. Primary elections will continue to be conducted in June of the even numbered year and General elections will still occur each November of even numbered years for the election of all partisan elected officials.

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