PURPOSE:

Section 127.007 of the Texas Election Code requires the Manager of the Central Counting Station (“CCS”) to “establish and implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the Central Counting Station.” This plan must be made available to the public on request not later than 5:00 p.m. on the fifth day before the date of the election, which is Thursday, February 29, 2024.

Section 127.007(b) provides that a CCS plan “must address the process for comparing the number of voters who signed the combination form with the number of votes cast for an entire election.”

A. LOCATION:

The Williamson County Central Counting Station will be located at Williamson County Elections Administration, 301 SE Inner Loop, Ste. 104, Tabulation Room, Georgetown, TX 78626. The Central Counting Station will convene at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 2, 2024, and 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, and at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 12, 2024.

B. CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PERSONNEL:

The following are the roles and responsibilities inside the Central Counting Station, as contained in Sections 127.002-127.006 of the Texas Election Code:

Central Count Presiding and Alternate Judges: Pamela Sharon, Mary Griffith and Monica Harwig, Dorothy Fontanella
Count Station Manager: Bridgette Escobedo
Tabulation Supervisor: Brandon Jenkins
Assistants to Tabulation Supervisor: Judith Ritchie, Peter Bazan, other qualified employees of Williamson County and employees of ES&S (as needed).

- The Elections Administrator, Bridgette Escobedo, will serve as the Central Counting Station Manager to manage the overall administration of the station and supervision of personnel. (Section 127.002)

- The Voting Systems Analyst, Brandon Jenkins, will serve as the Tabulation Supervisor to operate automatic tabulating equipment. (Section 127.003)

- The Assistants to the Tabulation Supervisor will assist the Tabulation Supervisor in the operation of the automatic tabulating equipment as directed by the Tabulation Supervisor. (Section 127.004)

- The Presiding Judges will serve to maintain order at the Central Counting Station, administer oaths, and receive ballots to be counted. Pamela Sharon and Mary Griffith will serve as the Presiding Judges and Monica Harwig and Dorothy Fontanella will serve as the Alternate Presiding Judges. (Section 127.005)

**Note:** The Presiding Judges are entitled to compensation at the same rate as a precinct Presiding Judge, except that the counting station judge is entitled to a minimum compensation of five hours' pay regardless of the amount of time worked. (Section 127.005 (d))

- Central Counting Station Clerks may be appointed as needed by the Central Counting Station Manager and the Presiding Judges as outlined in Section 127.006 of the Election Code.

**Note:** To be eligible to serve as a clerk a person must be a qualified voter of the county in which the central counting station is located. The general custodian of election records, an employee of the custodian, or any other employee of a political subdivision is not ineligible to serve as a clerk under this section because the person is a qualified voter of a county other than the county in which the central counting station is located or because of the custodian's status as a candidate or officeholder. (Section 127.006 (b))

A clerk appointed by the Manager serves under the Manager and shall perform the functions directed by the Manager. A clerk appointed by the Presiding or Alternate Judges serves under the Presiding or Alternate Judges and shall perform the functions directed by the Presiding or Alternate Judges. (Section 127.006 (C))

A clerk is entitled to compensation at the same rate as a precinct election clerk, except that a clerk who serves for the entire time a counting station is in operation is entitled to a minimum compensation of three hours' pay regardless of the amount of time worked. (Section 127.006 (d))
C. **PROCEDURES FOR CONVENING THE CENTRAL COUNTING STATION:**

Section 87.0241 (b)(2) of the Texas Election Code dictates when an entity is permitted to count ballots.

The Central Counting Station will convene based on the size and type of election as determined by the Central Counting Station Manager and the Presiding Judges.

The Central Counting Station will begin the process to count voted ballots by mail and early voting in-person ballots on Saturday, March 2, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. In accordance with Section 127.093 of the Texas Election Code, the second test of tabulating equipment will be conducted prior to beginning the process to count early voting ballots on Saturday, March 2, 2024.

The Central Counting Station will begin the process to count Election Day ballots on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, starting at 7:00 p.m. or when the Election Judge arrives with the USB results stick.

The Central Counting Station will begin the process to count accepted provisional ballots and accepted late ballots by mail on Tuesday, March 12, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

D. **ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS:**

Section 127.0015 of the Texas Election Code prescribes a required oath for all CCS personnel.

This oath should be administered verbally to all members of the early voting ballot board and all personnel at the central counting station prior to the performance of any duties by the board or the Central Counting Station.

For use in the March 5, 2024, Primary election:

"I swear (or affirm) that I will objectively work to be sure every eligible voter’s vote is accepted and counted, and that only the ballots of those voters who violated the Texas Election Code will be rejected. I will make every effort to correctly reflect the voter’s intent when it can be clearly determined. I will not work alone when ballots are present and will work only in the presence of a member of a political party different from my own. I will faithfully perform my duty as an officer of the election and guard the purity of the election."

E. **INTAKE OF BALLOTS, ELECTRONIC MEDIA, AND SUPPLIES:**

Sections 129.051 and 129.052 of the Texas Election Code require the general custodian of election records to develop certain procedures related to inventory control and chain of custody of voting system equipment and electronic media associated with this equipment,
providing for verification of equipment identifiers, verification of seals, and verification of chain of custody.

1. Election Judge, or their designee, brings paper ballot cards (in locked and sealed blue ballot bin) and USB-Drives (in blue sealed election bag) to the Williamson County Elections Department intake.
2. Intake personnel will verify location tags and verify the seals on the bags and bins are the same as the seal numbers on the seal log.
3. Intake personnel will deliver the blue ballot bin to a metro rack and the USB bag to the Tabulation Room where Central Counting Station Clerks will verify the seal numbers with the Ballot and Seal Certificate under the supervision of clerk assigned by the Presiding Judges.

F. DUPLICATION OF BALLOTS:

Certain ballots that are counted with automatic tabulating equipment may have to be duplicated if the ballot is damaged or cannot be read with the scanning equipment.

1. The manager of the Central Counting Station will have any unreadable or damaged ballots reduplicated in accordance with Section 127.125 and 127.126 of the Texas Election Code.

G. RESOLVING VOTER INTENT:

The CCS Presiding Judges will resolve any voter intent questions on the ballots as they are duplicated or manually counted, as applicable. (Section 65.009 and 127.125)

1. The Presiding and Alternate Judges will make a determination of voter intent prior to duplication of a ballot.
2. The duplicate ballot will then be created under the supervision of the Presiding and Alternate Judges in the manner in which the voter's intent was determined.

H. TABULATION PROCEDURES:

**EVBB After Early Voting-Saturday, March 2, 2024**

- The Presiding and Alternate Judges of Central Count will confirm seals match the Seal Log for Early Voting USB Bags, Ballot Bins and Provisional bags. Ballot bins will then be stored in a locked, secured location and remain unopened until needed.
- Early Voting USB bags and Emergency Bags (if needed) will be opened by the Presiding and Alternate Judges. Once seals have been verified, Early Voting Provisional Bags will be given to Elections Staff for processing. The Presiding and Alternate Judges will break the seals on all Early Voting USB Bags and remove the USB sticks.
In ElectionWare, before any data from the USB drives are loaded, a Zero Report will be printed from the ElectionWare software. A Zero Report will also be printed from the DS850s and signed by the Presiding and Alternate Judges of Central Count.

Before performing the Second Tabulation Test, the CCS Manager and the CCS Presiding Judge must verify that the seal on the container containing the test materials from the First Tabulation Test is intact and that the test materials are inside. After the verification, the Manager and Presiding Judge will break the seal and remove the test materials.

The Presiding and Alternate Judges of Central Count, and the Tabulation Supervisor will complete the 2nd Testing of the Tabulation Equipment.

If the test is successful, the Presiding Judge, shall certify in writing that a test was successful and the date and hour the test was completed. This certification shall be retained with the test materials. (Sec. 127.097)

After clearing the expected totals, a Zero Report will be run.

All USBs will be read into the ElectionWare Results Module by the Tabulation Supervisor with the Presiding and Alternate Judges of Central Count present.

Early Voting ballots by mail will be scanned at the DS850s. Any ballots needing to be reviewed will be resolved by the resolution board under the direction of the CCS Presiding Judges.

After all Early Voting ballots by mail have been scanned, results will be saved to a USB drive, and read into the ElectionWare Results Module.

The ballots by mail will then be placed in a ballot box which will be sealed by the Presiding and Alternate Judges and stored in the vault.

After the counting has concluded, the Tabulation Supervisor must store the vote tabulation on some form of electronic device (i.e., tabulation computer, removable media device, etc.) without producing a printed report of the early voting totals for each contest. TAC 81.36 (i)

The Tabulation Supervisor must run a report indicating the number of ballots counted for each precinct (or polling locations) and compare those numbers to the numbers provided on the ballot transmittal form, if applicable. This report is used to verify the number of ballots counted since a report showing early voting totals for each contest is not authorized to be produced prior to election day.

The Tabulation Supervisor must zero the votes on the tabulation device and run the Third Tabulation Test. If the Third Test is not successful, the count is void. TAC 81.36 (j)

Election Day: Tuesday, March 5, 2024

The central counting station personnel will reconvene on election day at a time determined by the CCS Manager. Prior to the start of counting any ballots, the 2nd test must be conducted to determine the tabulating equipment is tabulating correctly.

After a successful test has been conducted, the early voting results shall be reloaded into the tabulation software or otherwise added to the vote totals, depending on the type of voting system used. The Tabulation Supervisor must
run a report showing the number of the ballots counted. This report must be compared with the report that was run after the conclusion of counting to ensure that no additional ballots were counted after the CCS convened early.

- If the reports show a discrepancy, the previous count is void, and the ballots shall be recounted.
- After the polls close at 7:00 p.m., the Tabulation Supervisor or Assistants to the Tabulation Supervisor will use the Early Voting DS200 USB drives to print the results tapes for each Early Voting Site. The Presiding and Alternate Judges will sign the results tapes.
- On Election Day, early voting ballots, including ballots by mail received up to that point will be tabulated before 7:00 p.m., but in no case will results reports be released to the public before that time.
- The following reports will be generated and will be made available at request on a County Provided USB Drive along with any reports generated during Central Count: Admin Audit Events Report, Election Audit Events Report, Machine Audit Events Report and Manual Entry Report.

I. RECONCILIATION:

The process for comparing the number of voters listed as having voted and the number of ballots cast is done in three ways:

1. Early Voting in Person – Compare the number of early voting check-ins from Precinct Central to the number of ballots cast.
2. Early Voting by Mail – Compare the number of ballots entered on the “Ballot Transmittal Form” from the early voting ballot board to the number of ballots counted. (87.021, 87.1221)
3. Election Day – Compare the number of Election Day check-ins from Precinct Central to the number of ballots cast. (Section 127.007(b))

Additionally, in accordance with Texas Election Code Section 127.131(f), the Presiding Judges of the Central Counting Station shall provide and attest to a written reconciliation of votes and voters at the close of tabulation for Election Day and again after the Central Counting Station meets for the last time to process late-arriving ballots by mail and provisional ballots using a form created and rules promulgated by the secretary of state to facilitate compliance with this subsection. Once completed, the form shall be posted on a website maintained by the county along with election returns and results.

J. PRINTING OF PRECINCT RETURNS AND ELECTION TOTALS:

Under Section 127.127, the Tabulation Supervisor and the Assistants to the Tabulation Supervisor are the only ones authorized to operate the automatic tabulating equipment or handle ballots that are automatically counted. After the counting of ballots (or accumulation of vote totals) has occurred, under the direction of the Presiding Judges of the CCS the precinct election returns are prepared. The Presiding Judges are required to sign the precinct returns to certify their accuracy.
The printed “precinct by precinct” report will be adjusted to include any hand-counted ballots (if necessary) and constitutes our certified precinct returns. (Section 127.127(e))

The unofficial election results shall be released as soon as available after the polls close. Alternatively, the Presiding Judge of the CCS, in cooperation with the Elections Administrator may withhold the release of unofficial results until the last voter has voted. (Section 66.056 and 127.1311).

Unofficial election results will be released via Williamson County’s Elections Department webpage, beginning no earlier than 7:00p.m. on Election Day. Election Day results will be released incrementally as processed through acceptance and tabulation until all results are in.

K. REPORTING RESULTS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE:

For certain elections, including primary elections, the general election for state and county officers, and constitutional amendment elections, the SOS is required to tabulate the unofficial results statewide. (Section 68.001)

L. POLL WATCHERS:

Poll watchers are entitled to be present during the time the CCS has convened for the “purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station.” (Section 33.055)

The poll watcher must deliver both their certificate completion of the Texas SOS Poll Watcher Training and their certificate of appointment to the Presiding Judges of the CCS and the Presiding Judges must countersign their certificate of appointment.

Poll watcher(s) are entitled to sit or stand near enough to see and hear the counting activities. (Section 33.056) The ensure that all Poll Watchers can observe the activities in the tabulation room, the Presiding Judges will implement a system whereby Watchers will rotate into the tabulation room at predetermined intervals. No more than two watchers will be permitted in the tabulation room at any given time, and party parity will be followed.

All activities of poll watcher(s) shall be in compliance with the current Poll Watchers Guide issued by the Secretary of State.

M. DELIVERY OF MATERIALS TO THE GENERAL CUSTODIAN OF ELECTION RECORDS:

After the completion of the counting of ballots both on Election Day and after Election Day, if necessary, voted ballot cards, electronic media, election records, and election equipment
will be retained by this office, who is the general custodian of election records, through the appropriate retention period.

N. SECURITY PROCEDURES:

A Licensed Peace Officer will be posted at the Central Counting Station as required by Section 127.1232 (a) at any time that the CCS is convened. Live video streaming will be active during the time the CCS is convened on the Williamson County Election Department’s website. (Section 127.1232 (b))